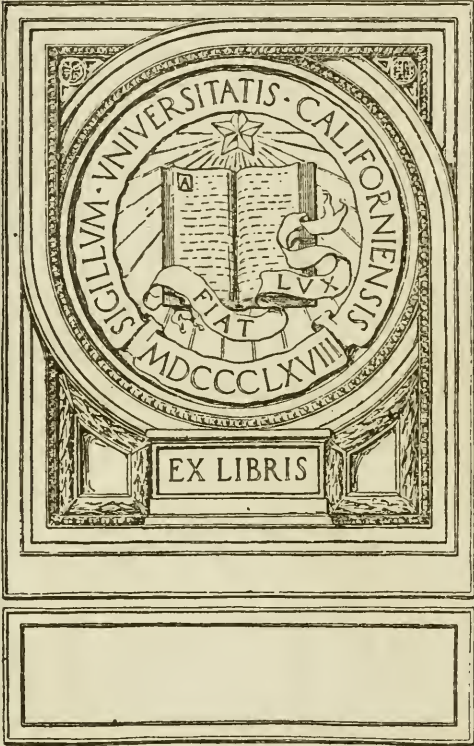




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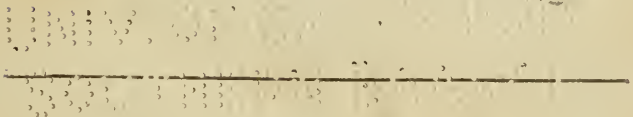
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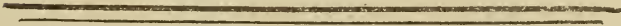
O N T H E

UTILITY OF CLASSICAL LEARNING.



BY JAMES BEATTIE, LL. D.

PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND LOGIC IN THE  
MARISCHAL COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN.



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AN ESSAY ON POETRY AND MUSIC,  
AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND.

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 the influence of the various nations and  
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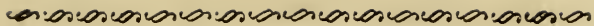
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A N

E S S A Y

O N

P O E T R Y

A N D

M U S I C,

AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND.



THE following Essays, (which were read in a private literary society many years ago), having been seen and approved of by some learned persons in England, are now published at their desire. In writing them out for the press, considerable amendments were made, and new observations added; and hence one or two slight anachronisms have arisen, which, as they affect not the sense, it was not thought necessary to guard against.



A N D

E S S A Y

O N

P O E T R Y

A N D

M U S I C,

AS THEY AFFECT THE MIND.

Written in the year 1762.

**T**HE rules of every useful art may be divided into two kinds. Some are necessary to the accomplishment of the end proposed by the artist, and are therefore denominated Essential Rules; while others, called Ornamental or Mechanical, have no better foundation than the practice of some great performer, whom it has become the fashion to imitate. The latter are to be learned from the communications of the artist, or by observing his

work : the former may be investigated upon the principles of reason and philosophy.

These two classes of rules, however different, have often been confounded by critical writers, without any material injury to art, or any great inconvenience, either to the artist or to his disciple. For frequently it happens, that fashion and philosophy coincide ; and that an artist gives the law in his profession, whose principles are as just as his performance is excellent. Such has been the fate of POETRY in particular. Homer, whom we consider as the founder of this art, because we have none more ancient to refer to, appears, in the structure of his two poems, to have proceeded upon a view of things equally comprehensive and rational : nor had Aristotle, in laying down the philosophy of the art, any thing more to do, than to trace out the principles of his contrivance. What the great critic has left on this subject, proves Homer to have been no less admirable as a philosopher than as a poet ; possessed not only of unbounded imagination, and all the powers of language, but also of a most exact judgement, which could at once propose a noble end, and devise the very best means of attaining it.

An art, thus founded on reason, could not fail to be durable. The propriety of the Homeric mode of invention has been acknowledged by the learned in all ages ; every real improvement which particular branch-

es of the art may have received since his time, has been conducted upon his principles; and poets, who never heard of his name, have, merely by their own good sense, been prompted to tread the path, which he, guided by the same internal monitor, had trod before them. And hence, notwithstanding its apparent licentiousness, true Poetry is a thing perfectly rational and regular; and nothing can be more strictly philosophical, than that part of criticism may and ought to be, which unfolds the general characters that distinguish it from other kinds of composition.

Whether the following discourse will in any degree justify this last remark, is submitted to the reader. It aspires to little other praise, than that of plain language and familiar illustration; disclaiming all paradoxical opinions and refined theories, which are indeed showy in the appearance, and not of difficult invention, but have no tendency to diffuse knowledge, or enlighten the human mind; and which, in matters of taste that have been canvassed by mankind these two thousand years, would seem to be peculiarly incongruous.

The train of thought that led me into this inquiry was suggested by a conversation many years ago, in which I had taken the freedom to offer an opinion different from what was maintained by the company, but warranted, as I then thought, and still think,  
by

by the greatest authorities and the best reasons. It was pleaded against me, that taste is capricious, and criticism variable; and that the rules of Aristotle's Poetics, being founded in the practice of Sophocles and Homer, ought not to be applied to the poems of other ages and nations. I admitted the plea, as far as these rules are local and temporary; but asserted, that many of them, being founded in nature, were indispensable, and could not be violated without such impropriety, as, though overlooked by some, would always be offensive to the greater part of readers, and obstruct the general end of poetical composition: and that it would be no less absurd, for a poet to violate the *essential* rules of his art, and justify himself by an appeal from the tribunal of Aristotle, than for a mechanic to construct an engine on principles inconsistent with the laws of motion, and excuse himself by disclaiming the authority of Sir Isaac Newton.

The characters that distinguish poetry from other works of literature, belong either to the SUBJECT, or to the LANGUAGE: so that this discourse naturally resolves itself into two parts. — What we have to say on Music will be found to belong to the first.

# P A R T I.

## POETRY CONSIDERED WITH RESPECT TO ITS MATTER OR SUBJECT.

**W**HEN we affirm, that every art or contrivance which has a meaning must have an end, we only repeat an identical proposition : and when we say, that the essential or indispensable rules of an art are those that direct to the accomplishment of the end proposed by the artist, we repeat a definition whereof it would be captious to controvert the propriety. And therefore, before we can determine any thing in regard to the essential rules of this art, we must form an idea of its **END OF DESTINATION.**

CHAP-

## C H A P T E R I.

## Of the end of Poetical Composition.

THAT one end of Poetry, in its first institution, and in every period of its progress, must have been, TO GIVE PLEASURE, will hardly admit of any doubt. If men first employed it to express their adoration of superior and invisible beings, their gratitude to the benefactors of mankind, their admiration of moral, intellectual, or corporeal excellence, or, in general, their love of what was agreeable in their own species, or in other parts of Nature; they must be supposed to have endeavoured to make their poetry *pleasing*; because, otherwise, it would have been unsuitable to the occasion that gave it birth, and to the sentiments it was intended to enliven. Or if, with Horace, we were to believe, that it was first used as a vehicle to convey into savage minds the principles of government and civility\*; still  
we

\* The honour of civilizing mankind, is by the poets ascribed to poetry, (*Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 391.*); — by the orator, to oratory, (*Cicero, de Orat. lib. 1. § 33.*); — and by others to philosophy, (*Cicero, de Orat. lib. 1.*

we must allow, that one chief thing attended to in its composition must have been, to give it charms sufficient to engage the ear and captivate the heart of an unthinking audience. In latter times, the true poet, though in chusing materials he never lost sight of utility, yet in giving them form, (and it is the *form* chiefly that distinguishes poetry from other writings), has always made the entertainment of mankind his principal concern. Indeed, we cannot conceive, that, independently on this consideration, men would ever have applied themselves to arts so little necessary to life, and withal so difficult, as music, painting, and poetry. Certain it is, that a poem, containing the most important truths, would meet with a cold reception, if destitute of those graces of sound, invention, and language, whereof the sole end and aim is, to give pleasure.

But is it not the end of this art, *to instruct*, as well as *to please*? Verses, that give pleasure only, without profit,—what are they but chiming trifles? And if a poem were to please, and at the same time, instead of improving, to corrupt the mind, would it not deserve to be considered as a poison ren-

§ 36. 37.; and *Tusc. Quest. lib. 5. § 5.*)—It is probably a gradual thing, the effect of many co-operating causes; and proceeding rather from favourable accidents, or the special appointment of Heaven, than from the art and contrivance of men.

dered doubly dangerous and detestable by its alluring qualities?—All this is true: and yet pleasure is undoubtedly the immediate aim of all those artifices by which poetry is distinguished from other compositions,—of the harmony, the rhythm, the ornamented language, the compact and diversified fable: for I believe it will be allowed, that a plain treatise, destitute of all these beauties, might be made to convey more instruction than any poem in the world. As writing is more excellent than painting, and speech than music, on account of its superior usefulness; so a discourse, containing profitable information even in a rude style, may be more excellent, because more useful, than any thing in Homer or Virgil: but such a discourse partakes no more of the nature of poetry, than language does of melody, or a manuscript of a picture; whereas an agreeable piece of writing may be poetical, though it yield little or no instruction. To instruct, is an end common to all good writing, to all poetry, all history, all sound philosophy. But of these last the principal end is to instruct; and if this single end be accomplished, the philosopher and the historian will be allowed to have acquitted themselves well: but the poet must do a great deal for the sake of pleasure only; and if he fail to please, he may indeed deserve praise on other accounts, but as a poet he has done nothing.—— But do not historians and philosophers, as well as  
poets,



poets, make it their study to please their readers? They generally do: but the former please, that they may instruct; the latter instruct, that they may the more effectually please. Pleasing, though uninstrucive, poetry may gratify a light mind; and what tends even to corrupt the heart may gratify profligates: but the true poet addresses his work, not to the giddy, nor to the worthless, nor to any party, but to mankind; and, if he means to please the *general* taste, must often employ instruction as one of the arts that minister to this kind of pleasure.

The necessity of this arises from a circumstance in human nature, which is to man (as Erasmus in Pope's opinion was to the priesthood) "at once his glory and his shame;" namely, that the human mind, unless when debased by passion or prejudice, never fails to take the side of truth and virtue: — a sad reflection, when it leads us to consider the debasing influence of passion and prejudice; but a most comfortable one, when it directs our view to the original dignity and rectitude of the human soul. To favour virtue, and speak truth, and take pleasure in those who do so, is natural to man; to act otherwise, requires an effort, does violence to nature, and always implies some evil purpose in the agent. The first, like progressive motion, is easy and graceful; the last is unseemly and difficult, like walking side-ways, or backwards. The one is

so common, that it is little attended to, and when it becomes the object of attention, is always considered as an energy suitable to moral and rational nature: the other has a strangeness in it, that provokes at once our surprize and disapprobation. And hence the virtuous character of the ancient chorus \* was reconcileable, not only to probability, but to real matter of fact.——The dramatic poets of Greece rightly judged, that great persons, like those who appear in tragedy, engaged in any great action, are never without attendants or spectators, or those at least who observe their conduct, and make remarks upon it. And therefore, together with the persons principally concerned, they always introduced attendants or spectators

\* Actoris partes chorus, officiumque virile

Defendat ——

Ille bonis faveatque, et consilietur amice,

Et regat iratos, et amet pacare tumentes;

Ille dapes laudet mensæ brevis; ille salubrem

Justitiam, legesque, et apertis otia portis;

Ille tegat commissa, Deosque precetur, et oret,

Ut redeat miseris, abeat fortuna superbis.

*Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 195.*

“ Let the chorus, like the player, support a character, and let it act a manly part. Let it favour the good, and give friendly counsel, and restrain the angry, and love to compose the swellings of passion. Let it celebrate the praises of temperance, of salutary justice, of law, and of peace, with open gates: let it be faithful to its trust, and supplicate the Gods, and pray, that fortune may return to the afflicted, and forsake the haughty.”

on the stage, who, by the mouth of one of their number, joined occasionally in the dialogue, and were called the Chorus. That this artifice, though perhaps it might not suit the modern drama, had a happy effect in beautifying the poetry, illustrating the morality, and heightening the probability, of the ancient, is a point, which in my opinion admits of sufficient proof, and has in fact been fully proved by Mr Mason, in his *Letters*, and admirably exemplified in his *Elfrida* and *Caractacus*; two poems that do honour to the English tongue, and to modern genius. But I do not now enter into any controversy on the subject: I speak of it with a view only to observe, that the propriety of the character assigned to the chorus is founded on that moral propensity above mentioned. For to introduce a company of unprejudiced persons, even of the vulgar, witnessing a great event, and yet not pitying the unfortunate, nor exclaiming against tyranny and injustice, nor rejoicing when the good are successful, nor wishing well to the worthy, would be to feign what seldom or never happens in real life; and what, therefore, in the improved state of things that poetry imitates, must never be supposed to happen.—Sentiments that betray a hard heart, a depraved understanding, unwarrantable pride, or any other moral or intellectual perversity, never fail to give offence, except where they appear to be introduced

as examples for our improvement. Poetry, therefore, that is uninstruative, or immoral, cannot please those who retain any moral sensibility, or uprightness of judgement; and must consequently displease the greater part of any regular society of rational creatures. Great wickedness and great genius may have been united in the same person; but it may be doubted, whether corruption of heart and delicacy of taste be at all compatible.

Whenever a writer forgets himself so far, as to give us ground to suspect him even of momentary impiety or hardheartedness, we charge him in the same breath with want of conscience and want of taste; the former being generally, as well as justly, supposed to comprehend the latter. Cowley was an excellent person, and a very witty poet: — but where is the man who would not be ashamed to acknowledge himself pleased with that clause in the following quotation, which implies, that the author, puffed up with an idle conceit of the importance of literary renown, was disposed for a moment to look down with equal contempt upon the brutes and the common people!

What shall I do, to be for ever known,  
 And make the age to come my own?  
 I shall like beasts or common people die,  
 Unless you write my elegy\*.

Virgil,

\* The learned and amiable Dr Hurd has omitted these two lines in his late edition of Cowley's poems. I wish some

Virgil, describing a plague among the beasts, gives the following picture, which has every excellence that can belong to descriptive poetry; and of which Scaliger, with a noble enthusiasm, declares, that he would rather be the author, than first favourite to Cyrus or Crefus :

Ecce autem duro fumans sub vomere taurus  
 Concidit, et mixtum spumis vomit ore cruorem,  
 Extremosque ciet gemitus. It tristis arator,  
 Mærentem abjungens fraterna morte juvencum,  
 Atque opere in medio defixa relinquit aratra.

Which Dryden thus renders :

The steer, who to the yoke was bred to bow,  
 (Studious of tillage, and the crooked plow),  
 Falls down and dies ; and, dying, spews a flood  
 Of foamy madness mixed with clotted blood.  
 The clown, *who cursing Providence repines,*  
 His mournful fellow from the team disjoins ;  
 With many a groan forsakes his fruitless care,  
 And in th' unfinish'd furrow leaves the share.

some editor of Dryden would expunge the last part of the following sentence, which, as it now stands, is a reproach to humanity. “ One is for raking in Chaucer  
 “ for antiquated words, which are never to be revived,  
 “ but when sound or significancy is wanting in the pre-  
 “ sent language : but many of his deserve not this re-  
 “ demption ; any more than the crouds of men who  
 “ daily die or are slain for sixpence in a battle, merit to  
 “ be restored to life, if a wish could revive them.”

*Postscript to Virgil.*

Not to insist upon the misrepresentation of Virgil's meaning in the first couplet, I would only appeal to the reader, whether, by debasing the charming simplicity of *It tristis arator* with his blasphemous paraphrase, Dryden has not destroyed the beauty of the passage \*. Such is the opposition between good poetry

\* Examples of bad writing might no doubt be produced, on almost any occasion, from Quarles and Blackmore; but as no body reads their works, no body is liable to be misled by them. It would seem, therefore, more expedient to take such examples from authors of merit, whose beauties too often give a sanction to their blemishes. For this reason it is, that I have, both here and in other places, taken the liberty to speak of Dryden with disapprobation. But as I would not be thought insensible to the merit of an author, to whom every lover of English poetry is deeply indebted, I beg leave, once for all, to deliver at large my opinion of that great genius.

There is no modern writer, whose style is more distinguishable. Energy and ease are its chief characters. The former is owing to a happy choice of expressions, equally emphatical and plain: the latter to a laudable partiality in favour of the idioms and radical words of the English tongue; the *native* riches and *peculiar* genius whereof are perhaps more apparent in him, than in any other of our poets. In Dryden's more correct pieces, we meet with no affectation of words of Greek or Latin etymology, no cumbersome pomp of epithets, no drawling circumlocutions, no idle glare of images, no blunderings round about a meaning: his English is pure and simple, nervous and clear, to a degree which Pope has never exceeded, and not always equalled. Yet, as I have elsewhere remarked, his attachment to the vernacular idiom, as well as the fashion of his age, often betrays him into a vulgarity, and even meanness, of expression, which is particularly observable in his translations

poetry and bad morality! So true it is, that the bard who would captivate the heart must

tions of Virgil and Homer; and in those parts of his writings where he aims at pathos or sublimity. In fact, Dryden's genius did not lead him to the sublime or pathetic. Good strokes of both may doubtless be found in him; but they are momentary, and seem to be accidental. He is too witty for the one, and too familiar for the other. That he had no adequate relish for the majesty of *Paradise Lost*, is evident to those who have compared his opera called *The state of innocence* with that immortal poem; and that his taste for the true pathetic was imperfect, too manifestly appears from the general tenor of his Translations, ás well as Tragedies: His Virgil abounds in lines and couplets of the most perfect beauty; but these are mixed with others of a different stamp: nor can they who judge of the original by this translation, ever receive any tolerable idea of that uniform magnificence of sound and language, that exquisite choice of words, and figures and that sweet pathos of expression and of sentiment, which characterise the Mantuan Poet. — In delineating the more familiar scenes of life, in clothing plain moral doctrines with easy and graceful versification, in the various departments of Comic Satire, and in the spirit and melody of his Lyric poems, Dryden is inferior to none of those who went before him. He exceeds his master Chaucer in the first: in the three last he rivals Horace; the style of whose epistles he has happily imitated in his *Religio Laici*, and other didactic pieces; and the harmony and elegance of whose odes he has proved that he could have equalled, if he had thought proper to cultivate that branch of the poetic art. Indeed, whether we consider his peculiar significancy of expression, or the purity of his style; the sweetness of his lyric, or the ease and perspicuity of his moral poems; the sportive severity of his satire, or his talents in wit and humour; Dryden, in point of *genius*, (I do not say *taste*), seems to bear a closer affinity to Horace, than to any other ancient or

must sing in unison to the voice of conscience!  
 — and that *instruction* (taking the word in no  
 unwarrantable

modern author. For energy of words, vivacity of description, and apposite variety of numbers, his *Feast of Alexander* is superior to any ode of Horace or Pindar now extant.

Dryden's verse, though often faulty, has a grace, and a spirit, peculiar to itself. That of Pope is more correct, and perhaps upon the whole more harmonious; but it is in general more languid, and less diversified. Pope's numbers are sweet but elaborate; and our sense of their energy is in some degree interrupted by our attention to the art displayed in their contexture: Dryden's are natural and free; and, while they communicate their own sprightly motion to the spirits of the reader, hurry him along with a gentle and pleasing violence, without giving him time either to animadvert on their faults, or to analyse their beauties. Pope excels in solemnity of sound; Dryden, in an easy melody, and boundless variety of rhythm. In this last respect I think I could prove, that he is superior to all other English poets, Milton himself not excepted. Till Dryden appeared, none of our writers in rhyme of the last century approached in any measure to the harmony of Fairfax and Spenser. Of Waller it can only be said, that he is not harsh; of Denham and Cowley, if a few couplets were struck out of their works, we could not say so much. But in Dryden's hands, the English rhiming couplet assumed a new form; and seems hardly susceptible of any further improvement. One of the greatest poets of this century, the late and much-lamented Mr Gray of Cambridge, modestly declared to me, that if there was in his own numbers any thing that deserved approbation, he had learned it all from Dryden.

Critics have often stated a comparison between Dryden and Pope, as poets of the same order, and who differed only in *degree* of merit. But, in my opinion, the merit of the one differs considerably in *kind* from that of the other. Both were happy in a sound judgement and  
 most



unwarrantable latitude) is one of the means that must be employed to render poetry agreeable.

For

most comprehensive mind. Wit, and humour, and learning too, they seem to have possessed in equal measure; or, if Dryden may be thought to have gone deeper in the sciences, Pope must be allowed to have been the greater adept in the arts. The diversities in point of correctness and delicacy, which arose from their different ways of life, I do not now insist upon. But, setting those aside, if Dryden founds any claim of preference on the originality of his manner, we shall venture to affirm; that Pope may found a similar claim, and with equal justice, on the perfection of his taste; and that, if the critical writings of the first are more voluminous, those of the second are more judicious; if Dryden's inventions are more diversified, those of Pope are more regular, and more important. Pope's style may be thought to have less simplicity, less vivacity, and less of the purity of the mother-tongue; but is at the same time more uniformly elevated, and less debased by vulgarity, than that of his great master:—and the superior variety that animates the numbers of the latter, will perhaps be found to be compensated by the steadier and more majestic modulation of the former. Thus far their merits would appear to be pretty equally balanced.—But if the opinion of those critics be true, who hold that the highest regions of Parnassus are appropriated to pathos and sublimity, Dryden must after all confess, that he has never ascended so far as his illustrious imitator: there being nothing in the writings of the first so deeply pathetic as the *Epistle of Eliza*, or the *Elegy on the Unfortunate Lady*; nor so uniformly sublime as the *Essay on Man*, or the *Pastoral of the Messiah*. This last is indeed but a selection and imitation of choice passages; but it bespeaks a power of imitation, and a taste in selection, that Dryden does not seem to have possessed. To all which may I not be permitted to add, what I think I could prove, that the pathos of Homer is frequently improved

For by instruction I do not here understand merely the communication of moral and physical truth. Whatever tends to raise those human affections that are favourable to truth and virtue, or to repress the opposite passions, will always gratify and improve our moral and intellectual powers, and may properly enough be called *instructive*.

by Pope, and that of Virgil very frequently debased by Dryden?

The writings of Dryden are stamped with originality, but are not always the better for that circumstance. Pope is an imitator professedly, and of choice; but to most of those whom he copies he is at least equal, and to many of them superior: and it is pleasing to observe, how he rises in proportion to his originals. Where he follows Denham, Buckingham, Roscomon, and Rochester, in his *Windfor-forest*, *Essay on Criticism*, and poem on *Silence*, he is superior indeed, but does not soar very high above them. When he versifies Chaucer, he catches, as by instinct, the ease, simplicity, and spirit of Dryden, whom he there emulates. In the *Rape of the Lock* he outshines Boileau, as much as the sylphs that flutter round Belinda exceed in sprightliness and luminous beauty those mechanical attendants of the goddess of luxury, who knead up plumpness for the chin of the canon, and pound vermilion for the cheek of the monk\*. His *Eloisa* is beyond all comparison more sublime and more interesting than any of Ovid's letter-writing ladies. His imitations of Horace equal their archetypes in elegance, and often surpass them in energy and fire. In the lyric style, he was no match for Dryden: but when he copies the manner of Virgil, and borrows the thoughts of Isaiah, Pope is superior not only to himself, but to almost all other poets.

\* See *Rape of the Lock*, canto 2. vers. 55.; and *Lutrin*, chant. 2. vers. 100.

All poetry, therefore, is intitled to this epithet, not only which imparts knowledge we had not before; but also which awakens our pity for the sufferings of our fellow-creatures; promotes a taste for the beauties of nature animated or inanimate; makes vice appear the object of indignation or ridicule; inculcates a sense of our dependence upon Heaven; fortifies our minds against the evils of life; or promotes the love of virtue and wisdom, either by delineating their native charms, or by setting before us in suitable colours the dreadful consequences of imprudent and immoral conduct. There are few good poems of length, that will not be found in one or more or perhaps in several of these respects, to promote the instruction of a reader of taste. Even the poem of Lucretius, notwithstanding its absurd philosophy, (which, when the author gives way to it, divests him for a time of the poetical, and even of the rational, character), abounds in sentiments of great beauty and high importance; and in such delightful pictures of nature, as must inflame the enthusiasm wherewith a well-informed mind contemplates the wonders and glories of creation. Who can attend to the execrable designs of Iago, to Macbeth's progress through the several stages of guilt and misery, to the ruin that overtakes the impious and tyrannical Mezentius, to the thoughts and machinations of Satan and his angels in Paradise Lost, without pay-  
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ing a fresh tribute of praise to virtue, and renewing his resolutions to persevere in the paths of innocence and peace! Nay the machinery of Homer's deities, which in many parts I abandon as indefensible, will, if I mistake not, generally appear, where-ever it is really pleasing, to have somewhat of an useful tendency. I speak not now of the importance of machinery, as an instrument of the sublime and of the marvellous, necessary to every epic poem; but of Homer's use of it in those passages where it is supposed by some to be unnecessary. And in these, it often serves to set off a simple fact with allegorical decoration, and, of course, by interesting us more in the fable, to impress upon us more effectually the instruction conveyed in it. And sometimes it is to be considered, as nothing more than a personification of the attributes of the divinity, or the operations of the human soul. And, in general, it teaches emphatically this important lesson, that Providence ever superintends the affairs of men; that injustice and impiety are peculiarly obnoxious to divine vengeance; and that a proper attention to religious and moral duty, never fails to recommend both nations and individuals to the divine favour.

But if instruction may be drawn from the speeches and behaviour of Milton's devils, of Shakespeare's Macbeth, and of Virgil's Mezentius, why is Cowley blamed for a phrase, which at worst implies only a slight  
fally

fally of momentary pride? I answer, that to speak seriously the language of intemperate passion, is one thing; to imitate or describe it another. By the former, one can never merit praise or esteem; by the latter one may merit much praise, and do much good. In the one case, we recommend intemperate passions by our example; in the other, we may render them odious, by displaying their absurdity and consequences. To the greater part of his readers an author cannot convey either pleasure or instruction, by delivering sentiments as his own, which contradict the general conscience of mankind.

Well; but Dryden, in the passage lately quoted and censured, does not deliver his own sentiments, but only describes those of another: why then should he be blamed for making the unfortunate plowman irreligious? Why? Because he misrepresents his author's meaning; and (which is worse) counteracts his design. The design of the Latin poet was, not to expatiate on the punishment due to blasphemy or atheism, but to raise pity, by describing the melancholy effects of a plague so fatal to the brute creation: — a theme very properly introduced in the conclusion of a poem on the art of rearing and preserving cattle. Now, had Virgil said, as Dryden has done, that the farmer who lost his work-beast was a blasphemer, we should not have pitied him at all. But Virgil says only,

ly, that “ the sorrowful husbandman went, “ and unyoked the surviving bullock, and “ left his plough fixed in the middle of the “ unfinished furrow ; ” — and by this pregnant and picturesque brevity, affects us a thousand times more, than he could have done by recapitulating all the sentiments of the poor farmer in the form of a soliloquy : — as indeed the view of the scene, as Virgil has drawn it, with the emphatic silence of the sufferer, would have been incomparably more moving, than a long speech from the plowman, fraught with moral reflections on death, and disappointment, and the uncertainty of human things. For to a poem mere morality is not so essential as accurate description ; which, however, in matters of importance, must have a moral tendency, otherwise the human affections will take part against it.

But what do you say to the tragedy of *Venice preserved*, in which our pity and other benevolent emotions are engaged in behalf of those whom the moral faculty disapproves ? Is not the poetry, for this very reason, immoral ? And yet, is it not pathetic and pleasing ? How then can you say, that something of a moral or instructive tendency is necessary to make a poem agreeable ? — In answer to this, let it be observed, — first, That it is natural for us to sympathise with those who suffer, even when they suffer justly ; which, however, implies not

any liking to their crimes, or that our moral sentiments are at all perverted, but which, on the contrary, by quickening our sense of the misery consequent upon guilt, may be useful in confirming good principles, and improving the moral sensibility of the mind : — secondly, That the most pleasing and most pathetic parts of the play in question are those which relate to an amiable lady, with whose distress, as well as with her husband's on her account, we rationally sympathise, because that arises from their mutual affection : — thirdly, That the conspirators give a plausible colour to their cause, and exert a greatness of mind, which takes off our attention from their crimes, and leaves room for the tender emotions to operate occasionally in their favour : — and fourthly, That the merit of this play, like that of *the Orphan*, lies rather in the beauty of particular passages, than in the general effect of the whole ; and that, if in any part the author has endeavoured to interest our kind affections in opposition to conscience, his poetry will there be found to be equally unpleasing and un-instructive.

But may not agreeable affections arise in the mind, which partake neither of vice nor of virtue ; such as joy, and hope, and those emotions that accompany the contemplation of external beauty, or magnificence ? And, if pastorals and songs, and Anacreontic odes, awaken these agreeable affections, may not

such poems be pleasing, without being instructive? This may be, no doubt. And for this reason, among others, I take instruction to be only a secondary end of poetry. But it is only by short poems, as songs and pastorals, that these agreeable affections indifferent alike to vice and virtue, are excited, without any mixture of others. For moral sentiments are so prevalent in the human mind, that no affection can long subsist there, without intermingling with them, and being assimilated to their nature. Nor can a piece of real and pleasing poetry be extended to any great length, without operating, directly or indirectly, either on those affections that are friendly to virtue, or on those sympathies that quicken our moral sensibility, and prepare us for virtuous impressions. In fact, man's true happiness is derived from the moral part of his constitution; and therefore we cannot suppose, that any thing which affects not his moral part, should be lastingly and generally agreeable. We sympathise with the pleasure one takes in a feast, where there is friendship, and an interchange of good offices; but not with the satisfaction an epicure finds in devouring a solitary banquet. A short Anacreontic we may relish for its melody and sparkling images; but a long poem, in order to be pleasing, must not only charm the ear and the fancy, but also touch the heart and exercise the conscience.

Still



Still perhaps it may be objected to these reasonings, That Horace, in a well-known verse \*, declares the end of poetry to be twofold, to please, or to instruct; whereas we maintain, that the ultimate end of this art is to please; instruction being only one of the means (and not always a necessary one) by which that ultimate end is to be accomplished. This interpretation of Horace has indeed been admitted by some modern critics: but it is erroneous; for the passage, rightly understood, will not appear to contain any thing inconsistent with the present doctrine. The author is there stating a comparison between the Greek and Roman writers, with a view to the poetry of the stage; and, after commending the former for their correctness, and for the liberal spirit wherewith they conducted their literary labours, and blaming his countrymen for their inaccuracy and avarice, he proceeds thus: “ The ends proposed by our dramatic poets (or by poets in general) are, to please, to instruct, or to do both. When instruction is your aim, let your moral sentences be expressed with brevity, that they may be readily understood, and long remembered: where you mean to please, let your fictions be conformable to truth, or probability. The elder part of your audience (or readers) have no relish for poems that give

\* Aut prodesse volunt, aut delectare poetæ.

“ pleasure only without instruction; nor  
 “ the younger for such writings as give in-  
 “ struction without pleasure. He only can  
 “ secure the universal suffrage in his favour,  
 “ who blends the useful with the agreeable,  
 “ and delights at the same time that he in-  
 “ structed the reader. Such are the works  
 “ that bring money to the bookseller, that  
 “ pass into foreign countries, and perpetuate  
 “ the author’s name through a long suc-  
 “ cession of ages \*.” — Now, what is the  
 meaning of all this? What, but that to the  
*perfection* of dramatic poetry (or, if you  
 please, of poetry in general) both sound mo-  
 rals and beautiful fiction are requisite. But  
 Horace never meant to say, that instruction,  
 as well as pleasure, is necessary to give to a-  
 ny composition the *poetical character*: or he  
 would not in another place have celebrated,  
 with so much affection and rapture, the  
 melting strains of Sappho, and the playful  
 genius of Anacreon †; — two authors tran-  
 scendently sweet, but not remarkably in-  
 structive. We are sure, that pathos, and  
 harmony, and elevated language, were, in  
 Horace’s opinion, essential to poetry ‡; and  
 of these decorations no body will affirm, that  
 instruction is the end, who considers that the

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. 333. — 347.

† Hor. Carm. lib. 4. ode 9.

‡ Hor. Sat. lib. 1. sat. 4. vers. 40.

most instructive books in the world are written in plain prose.

Let this therefore be established as a truth in criticism, That the end of poetry is, TO PLEASE. Verses, if pleasing, may be poetical, though they convey little or no instruction; but verses, whose sole merit is, that they convey instruction, are not poetical. Instruction, however, especially in poems of length, is necessary to their *perfection*, because they would not be *perfectly agreeable* without it.

## C H A P.    II.

### Of the Standard of Poetical Invention.

**H**OMER's beautiful description of the heavens and earth, as they appear in a calm evening by the light of the moon and stars, concludes with this circumstance, "And the heart of the shepherd is glad \*." Madame Dacier, from the turn she gives to the passage in her version, seems to think, and Pope, in order perhaps to make out his couplet, insinuates, that the gladness of the

\* Iliad, b. 8. vers. 555.

shepherd is owing to his sense of the utility of those luminaries. And this may in part be the case: but this is not in Homer; nor is it a necessary consideration. It is true, that, in contemplating the material universe, they who discern the causes and effects of things must be more rapturously entertained, than those who perceive nothing but shape and size, colour and motion. Yet, in the mere outside of Nature's works, (if I may so express myself), there is a splendour and a magnificence to which even untutored minds cannot attend, without great delight.

Not that all peasants, or all philosophers, are equally susceptible of these charming impressions. It is strange to observe the callousness of some men, before whom all the glories of heaven and earth pass in daily succession, without touching their hearts, elevating their fancy, or leaving any durable remembrance. Even of those who pretend to sensibility, how many are there to whom the lustre of the rising or setting sun; the sparkling concave of the midnight-sky; the mountain-forest tossing and roaring to the storm, or warbling with all the melodies of a summer-evening; the sweet interchange of hill and dale, shade and sunshine, grove, lawn, and water, which an extensive landscape offers to the view; the scenery of the ocean, so lovely, so majestic, and so tremendous, and the many pleasing varieties of the animal and vegetable kingdom, could never  
afford

afford so much real satisfaction, as the steams and noise of a ball-room, the insipid fiddling and squeaking of an opera, or the vexations and wranglings of a card-table!

But some minds there are of a different make; who, even in the early part of life, receive from the contemplation of Nature a species of delight which they would hardly exchange for any other; and who, as avarice and ambition are not the infirmities of that period, would, with equal sincerity and rapture, exclaim,

I care not, Fortune, what you me deny;  
 You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace;  
 You cannot shut the windows of the sky,  
 Through which Aurora shows her brightening face;  
 You cannot bar my constant feet to trace  
 The woods and lawns by living stream at eve \*.

Such minds have always in them the seeds of true taste, and frequently of imitative genius. At least, though their enthusiastic or visionary turn of mind (as the man of the world would call it) should not always incline them to practise poetry or painting, we need not scruple to affirm, that without some portion of this enthusiasm, no person ever became a true poet or painter. For he who would imitate the works of Nature, must first accurately observe them; and accurate

\* Castle of Indolence.

observation is to be expected from those only who take great pleasure in it.

To a mind thus disposed no part of creation is indifferent. In the crowded city, and howling wilderness; in the cultivated province, and solitary isle; in the flowery lawn, and craggy mountain; in the murmur of the rivulet, and in the uproar of the ocean; in the radiance of summer, and gloom of winter; in the thunder of heaven, and in the whisper of the breeze; he still finds something to rouse or to sooth his imagination, to draw forth his affections, or to employ his understanding. And from every mental energy that is not attended with pain, and even from some of those that are, as moderate terror and pity, a sound mind derives satisfaction; exercise being equally necessary to the body and the soul, and to both equally productive of health and pleasure.

This happy sensibility to the beauties of Nature should be cherished in young persons. It engages them to contemplate the Creator in his wonderful works; it purifies and harmonizes the soul, and prepares it for moral and intellectual discipline; it supplies an endless source of amusement; it contributes even to bodily health; and, as a strict analogy subsists between material and moral beauty, it leads the heart by an easy transition from the one to the other; and thus recommends virtue for its transcendent loveliness,

liness, and makes vice appear the object of contempt and abomination. An intimate acquaintance with the best descriptive poets, Spenser, Milton, and Thomson, but above all with the divine Georgic, joined to some practice in the art of drawing, will promote this amiable sensibility in early years; for then the face of Nature has novelty superadded to its other charms, the passions are not pre-engaged, the heart is free from care, and the imagination warm and romantic.

But, not to insist longer on those ardent emotions that are peculiar to the enthusiastic disciple of Nature, may it not be affirmed of all men, without exception, or at least of all the enlightened part of mankind, that they are gratified by the contemplation of things natural, as opposed to unnatural? monstrous sights please but for a moment, if they please at all; for they derive their charm from the beholder's amazement, which is quickly over. I have read indeed of a man of rank in Sicily\*, who chuses to adorn his villa with pictures and statues of most unnatural deformity; but it is a singular instance: and one would not be much more surpris'd to hear of a person living without food, or growing fat by the use of poison. To say of any thing, that it is *contrary to nature*, denotes censure and disgust on the part of the speaker; as the epithet *natural*

\* See Mr Brydone's Tour in Sicily, letter 24.

intimates an agreeable quality, and seems for the most part to imply, that a thing is as it ought to be, suitable to our own taste, and congenial with our own constitution. Think, with what sentiments we should peruse a poem, in which Nature was totally misrepresented, and principles of thought and of operation supposed to take place, repugnant to every thing we had seen or heard of: — in which, for example, avarice and coldness were ascribed to youth, and prodigality and passionate attachment to the old; in which men were made to act at random, sometimes according to character, and sometimes contrary to it; in which cruelty and envy were productive of love, and beneficence and kind affection of hatred; in which beauty was invariably the object of dislike, and ugliness of desire; in which society was rendered happy by atheism, and the promiscuous perpetration of crimes, and justice and fortitude were held in universal contempt. Or think, how we should relish a painting, where no regard was had to the proportions, colours, or any of the physical laws, of Nature: — where the ears and eyes of animals were placed in their shoulders; where the sky was green, and the grass crimson; where trees grew with their branches in the earth, and their roots in the air; where men were seen fighting after their heads were cut off, ships sailing on the land, lions entangled in cobwebs, sheep preying on dead carcasses, fishes



fishes sporting in the woods, and elephants walking on the sea. Could such figures and combinations give pleasure, or merit the appellation of sublime or beautiful? Should we hesitate to pronounce their author mad? And are the absurdities of madmen proper subjects either of amusement or of imitation to reasonable beings?

Let it be remarked too, that though we distinguish our internal powers by different names, because otherwise we could not speak of them so as to be understood, they are all but so many energies of the same individual mind; and therefore it is not to be supposed, that what contradicts any one leading faculty should yield permanent delight to the rest. That cannot be agreeable to reason, which conscience disapproves; nor can that gratify imagination, which is repugnant to reason.— Besides, belief and acquiescence of mind are pleasant, as distrust and disbelief are painful; and therefore, that only can give solid and general satisfaction, which has something of plausibility in it; something which we conceive it possible for a rational being to believe. But no rational being can acquiesce in what is obviously contrary to nature, or implies palpable absurdity.

Poetry, therefore, and indeed every art whose end is to please, must be natural; and if so, must exhibit real matter of fact, or something like it; that is, in other words,

must be, either according to truth, or according to verisimilitude.

And though every part of the material universe abounds in objects of pleasurable contemplation, yet nothing in nature so powerfully touches our hearts, or gives so great variety of exercise to our moral and intellectual faculties, as man. Human affairs and human feelings are universally interesting. There are many who have no great relish for the poetry that delineates only irrational or inanimate beings; but to that which exhibits the fortunes, the characters, and the conduct of men, there is hardly any person who does not listen with sympathy and delight. And hence, to imitate human action, is considered by Aristotle as essential to this art; and must be allowed to be essential to the most pleasing and most instructive part of it, I mean to epic and dramatic composition. Mere descriptions, however beautiful, and moral reflections, however just, become tiresome, where our passions are not occasionally awakened by some event that concerns our fellow-men. Do not all readers of taste receive peculiar pleasure from those little tales or episodes, with which Thomson's descriptive poem on the Seasons is here and there enlivened? and are they not sensible, that the thunder-storm would not have been half so interesting without the tale of the two lovers\* ; nor the

\* Summer, vers. 1174.

harvest-scene, without that of Palemon and Lavinia \*; nor the driving snows, without that exquisite picture of a man perishing among them †? It is much to be regretted, that Young did not employ the same artifice to animate his Night-Thoughts. Sentiments and descriptions may be regarded as the pilasters, carvings, gildings, and other decorations of the poetical fabric; but human actions are the columns and the rafters, that give it stability and elevation. Or, changing the metaphor, we may consider these as the soul which informs the lovely frame; while those are little more than the ornaments of the body.

Whether the pleasure we take in things natural, and our dislike to what is the reverse, be the effect of habit or of constitution, is not a material inquiry. There is nothing absurd in supposing, that between the soul, in its first formation, and the rest of nature, a mutual harmony and sympathy may have been established, which experience may indeed confirm, but no perverse habits could entirely subdue. As no sort of education could make man believe the contrary of a self-evident axiom, or reconcile him to a life of perfect solitude; so I should imagine, that our love of nature and regularity might still remain with us in some degree,

\* Autumn, vers. 177.

† Winter, vers. 276.

though

though we had been born and bred in the Sicilian villa above mentioned, and never heard any thing applauded but what deserved censure, nor censured but what merited applause. Yet habit must be allowed to have a powerful influence over the sentiments and feelings of mankind. Objects to which we have been long accustomed, we are apt to contract a fondness for; we conceive them readily, and contemplate them with pleasure; nor do we quit our old tracts of speculation or practice, without reluctance and pain. Hence in part arises our attachment to our own professions, our old acquaintance, our native soil, our homes, and to the very hills, streams, and rocks in our neighbourhood. It would therefore be strange, if man, accustomed as he is from his earliest days to the regularity of nature, did not contract a liking to her productions, and principles of operation.

Yet we neither expect nor desire, that every human invention, where the end is only to please, should be an exact transcript of real existence. It is enough, that the mind acquiesce in it as probable, or plausible, or such as we think might happen without any direct opposition to the laws of Nature: — or, to speak more accurately, it is enough, that it be consistent, either, first, with general experience; or, secondly, with popular opinion; or, thirdly, that it be consistent

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ent with itself, and connected with probable circumstances.

First: If a human invention be consistent with *general* experience, we acquiesce in it as sufficiently probable. *Particular* experiences, however, there may be, so uncommon and so little expected, that we should not admit their probability, if we did not know them to be true. No man of sense believes, that he has any likelihood of being enriched by the discovery of hidden treasure; or thinks it probable, on purchasing a lottery-ticket, that he shall gain the first prize; and yet great wealth has actually been acquired by such good fortune. But we should look upon these as poor expedients in a play or romance for bringing about a happy catastrophe. We expect that fiction should be more consonant to the *general* tenor of human affairs; in a word, that not possibility, but probability, should be the standard of poetical invention.

Secondly: Fiction is admitted as conformable to this standard, when it accords with received opinions. These may be erroneous, but are not often *apparently* repugnant to nature. On this account, and because they are familiar to us from our infancy, the mind readily acquiesces in them, or at least yields them that degree of credit which is necessary to render them pleasing. Hence the fairies, ghosts, and witches of Shakespeare, are admitted as probable beings; and angels obtain

obtain a place in religious pictures, though we know that they do not now appear in the scenery of real life. Even when a popular opinion has long been exploded, and has become repugnant to universal belief, the fictions built upon it are still admitted as natural, because they were accounted such by the people to whom they were first addressed; whose sentiments and views of things we are willing to adopt, when, by the power of pleasing description, we are introduced into their scenes, and made acquainted with their manners. Hence we admit the theology of the ancient poets, their Elysium and Tartarus, Scylla and Charybdis, Cyclops and Circe, and the rest of those “beautiful wonders” (as Horace calls them) which were believed in the heroic ages; as well as the demons and enchantments of Tasso, which may be supposed to have obtained no small degree of credit among the Italians of the sixteenth century, and are suitable enough to the notions that prevailed universally in Europe not long before \*. In fact, when

Poetry

\* In the fourteenth century, the common people of Italy believed, that the poet Dante actually went down to hell; that the *Inferno* was a true account of what he saw there; and that his fallow complexion, and stunted beard, (which seemed by its growth and colour to have been too near the fire), were the consequence of his passing so much of his time in that hot and smoky region. See *Vicende della letteratura del Sig. G. Denina*, cap. 4. — Sir John Mandeville’s *Book of Travels*, writ-

Poetry is in other respects true ; when it gives an accurate display of those parts of nature about which we know that men in all ages must have entertained the same opinion, I mean those appearances in the visible creation, and those feelings and workings of the human mind, which are obvious to all mankind ; — when Poetry, I say, is thus far according to nature, we are very willing to be indulgent to what is fictitious in it, and to grant a temporary allowance to any system of fable which the author pleases to adopt ; provided that he lay the scene in a distant country, or fix the date to a remote period. This is no unreasonable piece of complaisance : we owe it both to the poet and to ourselves ; for without it we should neither form a right estimate of his genius, nor receive from his works that pleasure which they were intended to impart. Let him, however, take care, that his system of fable be such, as his countrymen and contemporaries (to whom his work is immediately addressed) might be supposed capable of yielding their assent to ; for otherwise we should not believe him to be in earnest : and let him connect it as much as he can with

ten not long after, was not only ratified by the Pope, after having been compared with the *Mappa Mundi* of that time, but, what is more strange, seems to have been seriously believed by that adventurous knight himself, though a man of considerable learning, and no despicable taste. See the Conclusion of the Book.

probable circumstances, and make it appear in a series of events consistent with itself.

For (thirdly) if this be the case, we shall admit his story as probable, or at least as natural, and consequently be interested in it, even though it be not warranted by general experience, and derive but slender authority from popular opinion. Caliban, in the Tempest, would have shocked the mind as an improbability, if we had not been made acquainted with his origin, and seen his character displayed in a series of consistent behaviour. But when we are told, that he sprung from a witch and a demon, a connection not contrary to the laws of Nature, as they were understood in Shakespeare's time, and find his manners conformable to his descent, we are easily reconciled to the fiction. In the same sense, the Lilliputians of Swift may pass for probable beings; not so much because we know that a belief in pygmies was once current in the world, (for the true ancient pygmy was at least thrice as tall as those whom Gulliver visited), but because we find, that every circumstance relating to them accords with itself, and with their supposed character. It is not the size of the people only that is diminutive; their country, seas, ships, and towns, are all in exact proportion; their theological and political principles, their passions, manners, customs, and all the parts of their conduct, betray a levity and littleness perfectly suitable:



ble: and so simple is the whole narration, and apparently so artless and sincere, that I should not much wonder, if it had imposed (as I have been told it has) upon some persons of no contemptible understanding. The same degree of credit may perhaps for the same reasons be due to his giants. But when he grounds his narrative upon a contradiction to nature; when he presents us with rational brutes, and irrational men; when he tells us of horses building houses for habitation, milking cows for food, riding in carriages, and holding conversations on the laws and politics of Europe; not all his genius (and he there exerts it to the utmost) is able to reconcile us to so monstrous a fiction: we may smile at some of his absurd exaggerations; we may be pleased with the energy of style, and accuracy of description, in particular places; and a malevolent heart may triumph in the satire: but we can never relish it as a fable, because it is at once unnatural and self-contradictory. Swift's judgement seems to have forsaken him on this occasion\*: he wallows in nastiness and brutality;

\* There are improprieties in this narrative, which one would think a very slight attention to nature might have prevented; and which, without heightening the satire, serve only to aggravate the absurdity of the fable. *Houyhnhnms* are horses in perfection, with the addition of reason and virtue. Whatever, therefore, takes away from their perfection as horses, without adding to

brutality; and the general run of his satire is downright defamation. Lucian's *True History* is a heap of extravagancies put together without order or unity, or any other apparent design, than to ridicule the language and manner of grave authors. His ravings, which have no better right to the name of Fable, than a hill of rubbish has to that of Palace, are destitute of every colour of plausibility. Animal trees, ships sailing in the sky, armies of monstrous things travelling between the sun and moon on a pave-

their rational and moral accomplishments, must be repugnant to the author's design, and ought not to have found a place in his narration. Yet he makes his beloved quadrupeds  *dwell in houses*  of their own building, and use  *warm food*  and the  *milk of cows*  as a delicacy: though these luxuries, supposed attainable by a nation of horses, could contribute no more to their perfection, than brandy and imprisonment would to that of a man. — Again, did Swift believe, that religious ideas are natural to a reasonable being, and necessary to the happiness of a moral one? I hope he did. Yet has he represented his *houyhnhnms*, as patterns of moral virtue, as the greatest masters of reason, and withal as completely happy, without any religious ideas, or any views beyond the present life. In a word, he would make stupidity consistent with mental excellence, and unnatural appetites with animal perfection. These, however, are small matters, compared with the other absurdities of this abominable tale. — But when a Christian Divine can set himself deliberately to trample upon that nature, which he knows to have been made but a little lower than the angels, and to have been assumed by One far more exalted than they; we need not be surprised if the same perverse habits of thinking which harden his heart, should also debase his judgement.

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ment of cobwebs, rival nations of men inhabiting woods and mountains in a whale's belly, — are liker the dreams of a bedlamite, than the inventions of a rational being.

If we were to prosecute this subject any further, it would be proper to remark, that in some kinds of poetical invention a stricter probability is required than in others: — that, for instance, Comedy, whether Dramatic or Narrative \*, must seldom deviate from the ordinary course of human affairs, because it exhibits the manners of real, and even of familiar life; — that the Tragic poet, because he imitates characters more exalted, and generally refers to events little known, or long since past, may be allowed a wider range; but must never attempt the marvellous fictions of the Epic Muse, because he addresses his work, not only to the passions and imagination of mankind, but also to their eyes and ears, which are not easily imposed on, and refuse to be gratified with any representation that does not come very near the truth; — that the Epic Poem may claim still ampler privileges, because its fictions are not subject to the scrutiny of any outward sense, and because it conveys information in regard both to the highest human characters, and the most important and wonderful events,

\* Fielding's *Tom Jones*, *Amelia*, and *Joseph Andrews*, are examples of what I call the Epic or Narrative Comedy: perhaps *the Comic Epopee* is a more proper term.

and alſo to the affairs of unſeen worlds, and ſuperior beings. Nor would it be improper to obſerve, that the ſeveral ſpecies of Comic, of Tragic, of Epic compoſition, are not confined to the ſame degree of probability; for that Farce may be allowed to be leſs probable than the regular Comedy; the Maſque, than the regular Tragedy; and the Mixed Epic, ſuch as *The Fairy Queen*, and *Orlando Furioſo*, than the pure Epopee of Homer, Virgil, and Milton.—But this part of the ſubject ſeems not to require further illuſtration. Enough has been ſaid, to ſhow, that nothing unnatural can pleaſe; and that therefore Poetry, whoſe end is to pleaſe, muſt be ACCORDING TO NATURE.

And if ſo, it muſt be, either according to real nature, or according to nature ſomewhat different from the reality.

### C H A P. III.

Poetry exhibits a ſyſtem of nature ſomewhat different from the reality of things.

**T**O exhibit *real nature* is the buſineſs of the hiſtorian; who, if he were ſtrictly to confine himſelf to his own ſphere, would never

never record even the minutest circumstance of any speech, event, or description, which was not warranted by sufficient authority. It has been the language of critics in every age, that the historian ought to relate nothing as true which is false or dubious, and to conceal nothing material which he knows to be true. But I doubt whether any writer of profane history has ever been so scrupulous. Thucydides himself, who began his history when that war began which he records, and who set down every event soon after it happened, according to the most authentic information, seems however to have indulged his fancy not a little in his harangues and descriptions, particularly that of the plague of Athens: and the same thing has been practised, with greater latitude, by Livy and Tacitus, and more or less by all the best historians, both ancient and modern. Nor do I blame them for it. By these improved or invented speeches, and by the heightenings thus given to their descriptions, their work becomes more interesting, and more useful; nobody is deceived, and historical truth is not materially affected. A medium is however to be observed in this, as in other things. When the historian lengthens a description into a detail of fictitious events, as Voltaire has done in his account of the battle of Fontenoy, he loses his credit with us, by raising a suspicion that he is more intent upon a pretty story, than

upon

upon the truth. And we are disgusted with his insincerity, when, in defiance even of verisimilitude, he puts long elaborate orations in the mouth of those, of whom we know, either from the circumstances that they could not, or from more authentic records that they did not, make any such orations; as Dionysius of Halicarnassus has done, in the case of Volumnia haranguing her son Coriolanus, and Flavius Josephus in that of Judah addressing his brother as viceroy of Egypt. From what these historians relate, one would conjecture, that the Roman matron had studied at Athens under some long-winded rhetorician, and that the Jewish patriarch must have been one of the most flowery orators of antiquity. But the fictitious part of history, or of story-telling, ought never to take up much room; and must be highly blameable when it leads into any mistake either of facts or of characters.

Now, why do historians take the liberty to embellish their works in this manner? One reason, no doubt, is, that they may display their talents in oratory and narration: but the chief reason, as hinted already, is, to render their composition more agreeable. It would seem, then, that something more pleasing than real nature, or something which shall add to the pleasing qualities of real nature, may be devised by human fancy. And this may certainly be done. And this it is the poet's business to do. And when  
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this is in any degree done by the historian, his narrative becomes in that degree poetical.

The possibility of thus improving upon nature must be obvious to every one. When we look at a landscape, we can fancy a thousand additional embellishments. Mountains loftier and more picturesque; rivers more copious, more limpid, and more beautifully winding; smoother and wider lawns; vallies more richly diversified; caverns and rocks more gloomy and more stupendous; ruins more majestic; buildings more magnificent; oceans more varied with islands, more splendid with shipping, or more agitated by storm, than any we have ever seen, it is easy for human imagination to conceive. Many things in art and nature exceed expectation; but nothing sensible transcends, or equals, the capacity of thought: — a striking evidence of the dignity of the human soul! The finest woman in the world appears to every eye susceptible of improvement, except perhaps to that of her lover. No wonder, then, if in poetry events can be exhibited more compact, and of more pleasing variety, than those delineated by the historian, and scenes of inanimate nature more dreadful or more lovely, and human characters more sublime and more exquisite both in good and evil. Yet still let nature supply the ground-work and materials, as well as the standard, of poetical fiction. The most expert painters

use a layman, or other visible figure, to direct their hand and regulate their fancy. Homer himself founds his two poems on authentic tradition; and Tragic as well as Epic poets have followed the example. The writers of romance too are ambitious to interweave true adventures with their fables; and, when it can be conveniently done, to take the outlines of their plan from real life. Thus the tale of Robinson Crusoe is founded on an incident that actually befel one Alexander Selkirk, a sea-faring man, who lived several years alone in the island of Juan Fernandes; Smollet is thought to have given us several of his own adventures in the history of Roderick Random; and the chief characters in Tom Jones, Joseph Andrews, and Pamela, are said to have been copied from real originals.—Dramatic Comedy, indeed, is for the most part purely fictitious; for if it were to exhibit real events as well as present manners, it would become too personal to be endured by a well-bred audience, and degenerate into downright abuse; which appears to have been the case with the *old comedy* of the Greeks\*.—But, in general, hints taken from real existence will be found to give no little grace and stability to fiction, even in the most fanciful poems. Those hints, however, may be improved by

\* Compare Hor. lib. 1. sat. 4. vers. 1.—5. with Ar. Poet. vers. 281.—285.



the poet's imagination, and set off with every probable ornament that can be devised, consistently with the design and genius of the work;—or, in other words, with the sympathies that the poet means to awaken in the mind of his reader. For mere poetical ornament, when it fails to interest the affections, is not only useless but improper; all true poetry being addressed to the heart, and intended to give pleasure by raising or soothing the passions;—the only effectual way of pleasing a rational and moral creature. And therefore I would take Horace's maxim to be universal in poetry; “Non satis est, pulchra esse poemata; *dulcia* funto;” “It is not enough that poems be beautiful; let them also be *affecting*.”—for that this is the meaning of the word *dulcia* in this place, is admitted by the best interpreters, and is indeed evident from the context\*.

That the sentiments and feelings of percipient beings, when expressed in poetry, should call forth our affections, is natural enough; but can descriptions of inanimate things also be made affecting? Certainly they can: and the more they affect, the more they please us; and the more poetical we allow them to be. Virgil's *Georgic* is a noble specimen (and indeed the noblest in the world) of this sort of poetry. His admiration of external nature gains upon a read-

\* Hor. *Ar. Poet.* vers. 95.—100.

er of taste, till it rise to perfect enthusiasm. The following observations will perhaps explain this matter.

Every thing in nature is complex in itself, and bears innumerable relations to other things; and may therefore be viewed in an endless variety of lights, and consequently described in an endless variety of ways. Some descriptions are good, and others bad. An historical description, that enumerates all the qualities of any object, is certainly good, because it is true; but may be as uninteresting as a logical definition. In poetry no uninteresting description is good, however conformable to truth; for here we expect not a complete enumeration of qualities, (the chief end of the art being to please), but only such an enumeration as may give a lively and interesting idea. It is not memory, or the knowledge of rules, that can qualify a poet for this sort of description; but a peculiar liveliness of fancy and sensibility of heart, the nature whereof we may explain by its effects, but we cannot lay down rules for the attainment of it.

When our mind is occupied by any emotion, we naturally use words, and meditate on things, that are suitable to it, and tend to encourage it. If a man were to write a letter when he is very angry, there would probably be something of vehemence or bitterness in the style, even though the person to whom he wrote were not the object  
of

of his anger. The same thing holds true of every other strong passion or emotion:—while it predominates in the mind, it gives a peculiarity to our thoughts, as well as to our voice, gesture, and countenance: and hence we expect, that every personage introduced in poetry should see things through the medium of his ruling passion, and that his thoughts and language should be tinged accordingly. A melancholy man walking in a grove, attends to those things that suit and encourage his melancholy; the sighing of the wind in the trees, the murmuring of waters, the darkness and solitude of the shades: a chearful man in the same place, finds many subjects of chearful meditation, in the singing of birds, the brisk motions of the babling stream, and the liveliness and variety of the verdure. Persons of different characters, contemplating the same thing, a Roman triumph, for instance, feel different emotions, and turn their view to different objects. One is filled with wonder at such a display of wealth and power; another exults in the idea of conquest, and pants for military renown; a third, stunned with clamour, and harassed with confusion, wishes for silence, security, and solitude; one melts with pity to the vanquished, and makes many a sad reflection upon the insignificance of worldly grandeur, and the uncertainty of human things; while the buffoon, and perhaps the philosopher, considers the whole as a vain  
piece

piece of pageantry, which, by its solemn procedure, and by the admiration of so many people, is only rendered the more ridiculous:—and each of these persons would describe it in a way suitable to his own feelings, and tending to raise the same in others. We see in Milton's *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, how a different cast of mind produces a variety in the manner of conceiving and contemplating the same rural scenery. In the former of these excellent poems, the author personates a cheerful man, and takes notice of those things in external nature that are suitable to cheerful thoughts, and tend to encourage them; in the latter, every object described is serious and solemn, and productive of calm reflection and tender melancholy: and I should not be easily persuaded, that Milton wrote the first under the influence of sorrow, or the second under that of gladness.— We often see an author's character in his works; and if every author were in earnest when he writes, we should oftener see it. Thomson was a man of piety and benevolence, and a warm admirer of the beauties of nature; and every description in his delightful poem on the Seasons tends to raise the same laudable affections in his reader. The parts of nature that attract his notice are those which an impious or hardhearted man would neither attend to nor be affected with, at least in the same manner. In Swift we see a turn of mind very different

different from that of the amiable Thomson; little relish for the sublime or beautiful, and a perpetual succession of violent emotions. All his pictures of human life seem to show, that deformity and meanness were the favourite objects of his attention, and that his soul was a constant prey to indignation\*, disgust, and other gloomy passions arising from such a view of things. And it is the tendency of almost all his writings (though it was not always the author's design) to communicate the same passions to his reader: inasmuch, that, notwithstanding his erudition, and knowledge of the world, his abilities as a popular orator and man of business, the energy of his style, the elegance of some of his verses, and his extraordinary talents in wit and humour, there is reason to doubt, whether by studying his works any person was ever much improved in piety or benevolence.

And thus we see, how the compositions of an ingenious author may operate upon the heart, whatever be the subject. The affections that prevail in the author himself direct his attention to objects congenial, and give a peculiar bias to his inventive powers, and a peculiar colour to his language. Hence

\* For part of this remark we have his own authority, often in his letters, and very explicitly in the Latin Epitaph which he composed for himself:—“ubi sæva  
“indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit.” See his last  
will and testament.

his work, as well as face, if Nature is permitted to exert herself freely in it, will exhibit a picture of his mind, and awaken correspondent sympathies in the reader. When these are favourable to virtue, which they always ought to be, the work will have that *sweet pathos* which Horace alludes to in the passage above mentioned; and which we so highly admire, and so warmly approve, even in those parts of the Georgic that describe inanimate nature.

Horace's account of the matter in question differs not from what is here given. "It is not enough," says he, "that poems be beautiful; let them be affecting, and agitate the mind with whatever passions the poet wishes to impart. The human countenance, as it smiles on those who smile, accompanies also with sympathetic tears those who mourn. If you would have me weep, you must first weep yourself; then, and not before, shall I be touched with your misfortunes.—For nature *first* makes the emotions of our mind correspond with our circumstances, infusing real joy, sorrow, or resentment, according to the occasion; and *afterwards* gives the true pathetic utterance to the voice and language \*."—This doctrine, which concerns the orator and the player no less than the poet, is strictly philosophical,

\* Ar. Poet. vers. 99. — 111.

and equally applicable to dramatic, to descriptive, and indeed to every species of interesting poetry. The poet's sensibility must first of all engage him warmly in his subject, and in every part of it; otherwise he will labour in vain to interest the reader. If he would paint external nature, as Virgil and Thomson have done, so as to make her amiable to others, he must first be enamoured of her himself; if he would have his heroes and heroines speak the language of love or sorrow, devotion or courage, ambition or anger, benevolence or pity, his heart must be susceptible of those emotions, and in some degree feel them, as long at least as he employs himself in framing words for them; being assured, that

He best shall paint them who can feel them most \*.

The true poet, therefore, must not only study nature, and know the reality of things; but must also possess fancy, to invent additional decorations; judgement, to direct him in the choice of such as accord with verisimilitude; and sensibility, to enter with ardent emotions into every part of his subject, so as to transfuse into his work a pathos and energy sufficient to raise corresponding emotions in the reader.

“The historian and the poet,” says Ari-

\* Pope's *Eloisa*, vers. 366.

stotle, “ differ in this, that the former exhibits things as they are, the latter as they might be\*.”—I suppose he means, in that state of perfection which is consistent with probability, and in which, for the sake of our own gratification, we wish to find them. If the poet, after all the liberties he is allowed to take with the truth, can produce nothing more exquisite than is commonly to be met with in history, his reader will be disappointed and dissatisfied. Poetical representations must therefore be framed after a pattern of the highest probable perfection that the genius of the work will admit:—external nature must in them be more picturesque than in reality; action more animated; sentiments more expressive of the feelings and character, and more suitable to the circumstances of the speaker; personages better accomplished in those qualities that raise admiration, pity, terror, and other ardent emotions; and events, more compact, more clearly connected with causes and consequences, and unfolded in an order more flattering to the fancy, and more interesting to the passions. But where, it may be said, is this pattern of perfection to be found? Not in real nature; otherwise history, which delineates real nature, would also delineate this pattern of perfection. It is to be found only in the mind of the poet;

\* Poetic. sect. 9.



and it is imagination, regulated by knowledge, that enables him to form it.

In the beginning of life, and while experience is confined to a small circle, we admire every thing, and are pleased with very moderate excellence. A peasant thinks the hall of his landlord the finest apartment in the universe, listens with rapture to the strolling ballad-singer, and wonders at the rude wooden cuts that adorn his ruder compositions. A child looks upon his native village as a town; upon the brook that runs by, as a river; and upon the meadows and hills in the neighbourhood, as the most spacious and beautiful that can be. But when, after long absence, he returns in his declining years, to visit, once before he die, the dear spot that gave him birth, and those scenes whereof he remembers rather the original charms than the exact proportions, how is he disappointed to find every thing so debased, and so diminished! The hills seem to have sunk into the ground, the brook to be dried up, and the village to be forsaken of its people; the parish-church, stripped of all its fancied magnificence, is become low, gloomy, and narrow, and the fields are now only the miniature of what they were. Had he never left this spot, his notions might have remained the same as at first; and had he travelled but a little way from it, they would not perhaps have received any material enlargement. It seems then to be from

observation of many things of the same or similar kinds, that we acquire the talent of forming ideas more perfect than the real objects that lie immediately around us: and these ideas we may improve gradually more and more, according to the vivacity of our mind, and extent of our experience, till at last we come to raise them to a degree of perfection superior to any thing to be found in real life. There cannot, sure, be any mystery in this doctrine; for we think and speak to the same purpose every day. Thus nothing is more common than to say, that such an artist excels all we have ever known in his profession, and yet that we can still conceive a superior performance. A moralist, by bringing together into one view the separate virtues of many persons, is enabled to lay down a system of duty more perfect than any he has ever seen exemplified in human conduct. Whatever be the emotion the poet intends to raise in his reader, whether admiration or terror, joy or sorrow; and whatever be the object he would exhibit, whether Venus or Tisiphone, Achilles or Therfites, a palace or a pile of ruins, a dance or a battle; he generally copies an idea of his own imagination; considering each quality as it is found to exist in several individuals of a species, and thence forming an assemblage more or less perfect in its kind, according to the purpose to which he means to apply it.

Hence

Hence it would appear, that the ideas of Poetry are rather general than singular; rather collected from the examination of a species or class of things, than copied from an individual. And this, according to Aristotle, is in fact the case, at least for the most part; whence that critic determines, that Poetry is something more exquisite and more philosophical than history \*. The historian may describe Bucephalus, but the poet delineates a war-horse; the former must have seen the animal he speaks of, or received authentic information concerning it, if he mean to describe it historically; for the latter it is enough that he has seen several animals of that sort. The former tells us, what Alcibiades actually did and said; the latter, what such a species of human character as that which bears the name of Achilles would probably do or say in certain given circumstances.

It is indeed true, that the poet may, and often does, copy after individual objects. Homer, no doubt, took his characters from the life; or at least, in forming them, was careful to follow tradition as far as the nature of his plan would allow. But he probably took the freedom to add or heighten some qualities, and take away others; to make Achilles, for example, stronger, perhaps, and more impetuous, and more emi-

\* Poetic. sect. 9.

ment for filial affection, and Hector more patriotic and more amiable, than he really was. If he had not done this, or something like it, his work would have been rather a history than a poem; would have exhibited men and things as they were, and not as they might have been; and Achilles and Hector would have been the names of individual and real heroes; whereas, according to Aristotle, they are rather to be considered as two distinct modifications or species of the heroic character. — Shakespeare's account of the cliffs of Dover comes so near the truth, that we cannot doubt of its having been written by one who had seen them: but he who takes it for an exact historical description, will be surpris'd when he comes to the place, and finds those cliffs not half so lofty as the poet had made him believe. An historian would be to blame for such amplification; because, being to describe an individual precipice, he ought to tell us just what it is; which if he did, the description would suit that place, and perhaps no other in the whole world. But the poet means only to give an idea of what such a precipice may be; and therefore his description may perhaps be equally applicable to many such chalky precipices on the sea-shore.

This method of copying after general ideas formed by the artist from observation of many individuals, distinguishes the Italian, and all the sublime painters, from the Dutch, and their

their imitators. These give us bare nature, with the imperfections and peculiarities of individual things or persons; but those give nature improved as far as probability and the design of the piece will admit. Teniers and Hogarth draw faces, and figures, and dresses, from real life, and present manners; and therefore their pieces must in some degree lose the effect, and become awkward, when the present fashions become obsolete.—Raphael and Reynolds take their models from general nature; avoiding, as far as possible, (at least in all their great performances), those peculiarities that derive their beauty from mere fashion; and therefore their works must give pleasure, and appear elegant, as long as men are capable of forming general ideas, and of judging from them. The last-mentioned incomparable artist is particularly observant of children, whose looks and attitudes, being less under the control of art and local manners, are more characteristical of the species, than those of men and women. This field of observation has supplied him with many fine figures, particularly that most exquisite one of Comedy, struggling for and winning (for who could resist her!) the affections of Garrick:—a figure which could never have occurred to the imagination of a painter who had confined his views to grown persons looking and moving in all the formality of polite life:—a figure which in all ages and countries would be pronounced

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ced natural and engaging; — whereas those human forms that we see every day bowing, and courtesying, and strutting, and turning out their toes, *secundum artem*, and dressed in ruffles, and wigs, and flounces, and hoop-petticoats, and full-trimmed suits, would appear elegant no further than the present fashions are propagated, and no longer than they remain unaltered.

I have heard it disputed, whether a portrait ought to be habited according to the fashion of the times, or in one of those dresses which, on account of their elegance, or having been long in use, are affected by great painters, and therefore called picturesque. The question may be determined upon the principles here laid down. If you wish to have a portrait of your friend, that shall always be elegant, and never awkward, chuse a picturesque dress. But if you mean to preserve the remembrance of a particular suit of cloaths, without minding the ridiculous figure which your friend will probably cut in it a hundred years hence, you may array his picture according to the fashion. The history of dresses may be worth preserving: but who would have his image set up, for the purpose of hanging a coat or periwig upon it, to gratify the curiosity of antiquarian tailors or wigmakers?

There is, in the progress of human society, as well as of human life, a period to which it is of great importance for the  
higher

higher order of poets to attend, and from which they will do well to take their characters, and manners, and the era of their events; I mean, that wherein men are raised above savage life, and considerably improved by arts, government, and conversation; but not advanced so high in the ascent towards politeness, as to have acquired a habit of disguising their thoughts and passions, and of reducing their behaviour to the uniformity of the mode. Such was the period which Homer had the good fortune (as a poet) to live in, and to celebrate. This is the period at which the manners of men are most picturesque, and their adventures most romantic. This is the period when the appetites, unperverted by luxury, the powers unenervated by effeminacy, and the thoughts disengaged from artificial restraint, will, in persons of similar dispositions and circumstances, operate in nearly the same way; and when, consequently, the characters of particular men will approach to the nature of poetical or general ideas, and, if well imitated, give pleasure to the whole, or at least to a great majority of mankind. But a character tinged with the fashions of polite life would not be so generally interesting. Like a human figure adjusted by a modern dancing-master, and dressed by a modern tailor, it may have a good effect in satire, comedy, or farce; but if introduced into the higher poetry, it would be admired by

those only who had learned to admire nothing but present fashions, and by them no longer than the present fashions lasted; and to all the rest of the world would appear awkward, unaffecting, and perhaps ridiculous. But Achilles and Sarpedon, Diomedes and Hector, Nestor and Ulysses, as drawn by Homer, must in all ages, independently on fashion, command the attention and admiration of mankind. These have the qualities that are universally known to belong to human nature; whereas the modern fine gentleman is distinguished by qualities that belong only to a particular age, society, and corner of the world. I speak not of moral or intellectual virtues, which are objects of admiration to every age; but of those outward accomplishments, and that particular temperature of the passions, which form the most perceptible part of a human character.—As, therefore, the politician, in discussing the rights of mankind, must often allude to an imaginary state of nature; so the poet who intends to raise admiration, pity, terror, and other important emotions, in the generality of mankind, especially in those readers whose minds are most improved, must take his pictures of life and manners, rather from the heroic period we now speak of, than from the ages of refinement; and must therefore (to repeat the maxim of Aristotle) “exhibit things, not as they are, but as they might be.”

If,



If, then, there be any nations who entertain such a partiality in favour of one system of artificial manners, that they cannot endure any other system, either artificial or natural; may we not fairly conclude, that in those nations Epic poetry will not flourish? How far this may account for any peculiarities in the taste and literature of a neighbouring nation \*, is submitted to the reader. — Were a man so perverted by nature, or by habit, as to think no state of the human body graceful, but what depends on lace and fringe, powder and pomatum, buckram and whalebone, I should not wonder, if he beheld with dissatisfaction the naked majesty of the Apollo Belvidere, or the flowing simplicity of robe that arrays a Cicero or Flora. But if one of his favourite figures were to be carried about the world in company with these statues, I believe the general voice of mankind would not ratify his judgement. Homer's simple manners may disgust a Terrasson, or a Chesterfield; but will always please the universal taste, because they are more picturesque in themselves, than any form of artificial manners can be,

\* Je me souviens, que lorsque je consultai, sur ma Henriade, feu M. de Malezieux, homme qui joignait une grande imagination à une littérature immense, il me dit : Vous entreprenez un ouvrage qui n'est pas fait pour notre nation ; LES FRANÇAIS N'ONT PAS LA TÊTE EPIQUE.

*Voltaire. Essai sur la poésie épique, chap. 9.*

and more suitable to those ideas of human life which are most familiar to the human mind.

Let it not be thought, that I have any partiality to the tenets of those philosophers who recommend the manners of the heroic period, or even of the savage state, as better in a moral view, than those of our own time; or that I mean any reflection upon the virtue or good sense of the age, when I speak disrespectfully of some fashionable articles of external decoration. Our dress and attitudes are not perhaps so graceful as they might be: but that is not our fault, for it depends on causes which are not in our power: — that affects not the virtue of any good man, and no degree of outward elegance will ever reform the heart of a bad one: and that is no more a proof of our ill taste, than the roughness of our language, or the coldness of our climate. As a moralist, one would estimate the things of this life by their influence on the next; but I here speak as a critic, and judge of things according to their effects in the fine arts. Poetry, as an instrument of pleasure, gives the preference to those things that have most variety, and operate most powerfully on the passions; and, as an art that conveys instruction rather by example than by precept, must exhibit evil as well as good, and vicious as well as virtuous characters. That savages, and heroes like those of Homer, may sleep found-

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er; and eat and drink, and perhaps fight, with a keener appetite, than modern Europeans; that they may excel us in strength, swiftness, and many sorts of manual dexterity; in a word, that they may be *finer animals* than we; and further, that, being subject to fewer restraints both from virtue and from delicacy, they may display a more animated picture of the undisguised energies of the human soul, I am very willing to allow: but I hold, that the manners of polished life are beyond comparison more favourable to that benevolence, piety, and self-government, which are the glory of the Christian character, and the highest perfection of our nature, as rational and immortal beings. The former state of mankind I would therefore prefer as the best subject of Epic and Tragic Poetry: but for supplying the means of real happiness here, and of eternal felicity hereafter, every man of reflection, unless blinded by hypothesis, or by prejudice, must give the preference to the latter.

CHAP-

## C H A P. IV.

## The subject continued. Of Poetical Characters.

**H**ORACE seems to think, that a competent knowledge of moral philosophy will fit an author for assigning the suitable qualities and duties to each poetical personage\*. The maxim may be true, as far as mere morality is the aim of the poet; but cannot be understood to refer to the delineation of poetical characters in general: for a thorough acquaintance with all the moral philosophy in the world would not have enabled Blackmore to paint such a personage as Homer's Achilles, Shakespeare's Othello, or the Satan of Paradise Lost. To a competency of moral science, there must be added an extensive knowledge of mankind, a warm and elevated imagination, and the greatest sensibility of heart, before a genius can be formed equal to so difficult a task. Horace is indeed so sensible of the danger of introducing a new character in poetry, that he even discourages the attempt, and advises the poet

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 309. — 316.

rather to take his persons from the ancient authors, or from tradition \*.

To conceive the idea of a good man, and to invent and support a great poetical character, are two very different things, however they may seem to have been confounded by some late critics. The first is easy to any person sufficiently instructed in the duties of life; the last is perhaps of all the efforts of human genius the most difficult; so very difficult, that, though attempted by many, Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton, are almost the only authors who have succeeded in it. But characters of perfect virtue are not the most proper for poetry. It seems to be agreed, that the Deity should not be introduced in the machinery of a poetical fable. To ascribe to him words and actions of our own invention, is in my judgement very unbecoming; nor can a poetical description, that is known to be, and must of necessity be, infinitely inadequate, ever satisfy the human mind †. Poetry, according to  
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\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 119. — 130.

† It is somewhat amusing to observe, what different ideas our poets have entertained of the manner of speaking that may be most suitable to the Divine Nature. Milton ascribes to him that mode of reasoning which in his own age was thought to be the most sacred and most important. Cowley, in his *Davidis*, introduces the Deity speaking in the Alexandrine measure; from an opinion, no doubt, that a line of six feet has more dig-  
nity

the best critics, is an imitation of human action; and therefore poetical characters, though elevated, should still partake of the passions and frailties of humanity. If it were not for the vices of some principal personages, the *Iliad* would not be either so interesting or so moral: — the most moving and most eventful parts of the *Æneid* are those that describe the effects of unlawful passion \* : —  
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nity than one of five. Brown, on the contrary, in *The Cure of Saul*, supposes him to speak in rhyming verses of three syllables. And the author of *Pre-existence, a Poem*, in Doddsley's Collection, thinks it more congruous, that the Supreme Being should "set wide the fate of things," in a speech "majestically long, repugnant to all princes customs here," &c.

\* The destruction of Troy, the war with Turnus, and the despair and death of Dido, are here alluded to. That the first was owing to criminal passion, is well known. On the fate of Turnus and Dido, I beg leave to offer a few remarks.

1. Turnus is a brave and gallant young prince: but his disobedience to the will of Jupiter, as repeatedly declared by oracles and prodigies whereof he could not misunderstand the meaning, (*Æneid*, vii. *vers.* 104. & 596.), in persisting to urge his claim to Lavinia, whom Fate had destined to be the wife of his rival, engages him in the war which concludes with his death. We pity his fall, of which, however, himself, with his dying breath, acknowledges the justice. Had he been less amiable, we should have been less interested in his fate; had he been more virtuous, the poet must either have omitted the Italian war altogether, or brought it about by means less probable perhaps, and less honourable to the Trojans, and consequently to Rome. Piety to the gods is every where recommended by Virgil as the first

the most instructive tragedy in the world, I mean Macbeth, is founded in crimes of dreadful

and greatest human virtue, to which all other duties and all other affections are to give place, when they happen to be inconsistent.

2. The loves of Eneas and Dido are criminal on both sides. By connecting himself with this unfortunate queen, with whom he knew that he could not, without disobedience to the will of Heaven, remain, he is guilty, not only of impiety, but also of a temporary neglect of duty to his people as their leader and sovereign: and she, in obtruding herself upon the Trojan prince, violates the most solemn vows, and acts a part of which she could not be ignorant, that it was incompatible with his destiny; for he had told her from the first, that he was appointed by Fate to settle his Trojans in Italy, and to marry a wife of that country. *Æneid.* ii. 781. — Dido has many great and many amiable qualities: yet the Poet blends in her character some harsh ingredients; with a view, no doubt, partly to reconcile us in some measure to her sad catastrophe, but chiefly to make her appear in the eyes of his countrymen an adequate representative of that people, who had so long been the object of their jealousy and hatred. Her passion for Eneas is disrespectful to the gods, injurious to that prince and his followers, and indecent in itself: she is somewhat libertine in her religious principles; a shocking circumstance in a lady, and which to our pious poet must have been peculiarly offensive: and her behaviour, when Eneas is going to leave her, though suitable to a haughty princess under the power of a passion more violent than delicate, is not at all what we should expect from that softness of nature, and gentleness of affection, without which no woman can be truly amiable. If we except her wish for a young Eneas, there is hardly one sentiment of feminine tenderness, in all her threats, complaints, and expostulations. Pride, self-condemnation, and revenge, engross her whole soul, and extinguish every other thought; and she concludes her life, by imprecating, with cool,

dreadful enormity : —and if Milton had not taken into his plan the fall of our first parents,

but dreadful solemnity, perdition upon the fugitive Trojan, and misery upon his people, and their descendants, for ever.

Virgil has been blamed for some things in the conduct of this part of the poem; I know not with what good reason. He was not obliged to give moral perfection to his characters. That of Æneas, if it had been less perfect, might perhaps have made the poem more animated; but then it would not have suited the poet's main design of reconciling the Romans to the person and government of Augustus, of whom Æneas is to be considered as the poetical type. This hero does indeed, in attaching himself to Dido, act inconsistently with his pious and patriotic character; but his fault is human, and not without circumstances of alleviation: and we must not estimate the morality of an action by its consequences, except where they might have been foreseen. But he is no sooner reprimanded by Mercury for his transgression, than he returns to his duty, notwithstanding his liking to the country, and his love for the lady, which now seems to be more delicate, than hers for him. — But is not Dido's fault also human, and attended also with alleviating circumstances? — and if so, is not her punishment greater than her crime? — Granting all this, it will not follow, that Virgil is to blame. Poetry, if strict retributive justice were always to be expected in it, would not be an imitation of human life; and, as all its great events would be anticipated, and exactly such as we wish for, could melt or surprise us no longer. In fact, unlawful love has, in every age, been attended with worse consequences to the weaker, than to the stronger sex; not because it is less unlawful in the one than in the other; but that the former may be guarded by the strongest motives of interest, as well as of honour and duty; and the latter restrained by every principle, not only of conscience, but also of generosity and compassion. Our poet assigns to Dido, in the shades below, one of the  
least



rents, as well as their state of innocence, his divine poem must have wanted much of its

least uncomfortable situations in the *region of mourning*; from whence, according to his system, (see the *Essay on Truth*, part 3. chap. 2.) after undergoing the necessary pains of purification, she was to pass into Elysium, and enjoy the pleasures of that happy place for a thousand years; and afterwards to be sent back to earth to animate another body, and thus have another opportunity of rising to virtue and happiness by a suitable behaviour.

Those incidents, and those only, are blameable in a poem, which either hurt the main design, or are in themselves unnatural, insipid, or immoral. The episode of Dido, as Virgil has given it, is perfectly consonant with his main design; for it sets his hero in a new light, and raises our idea of his personal accomplishments; and must have been particularly interesting to the Romans, as it accounts for their jealousy of Carthage, one of the most important events in all their history. Unnatural or insipid this episode cannot be called; for it is without doubt the finest piece of poetry in the world: the whole description of Dido's love, in every period of its progress, from its commencement to its lamentable conclusion, is sublime, and harmonious, natural, pathetic, and picturesque, to a degree which was never equalled, and never can be surpassed. And who will object to the morality of that fable, which recommends piety and patriotism as the most indispensable duties of a sovereign; and paints, in the most terrifying colours, the fatal effects of female imprudence, of opposition to the will of Heaven, of the violation of solemn vows, and the gratification of criminal desires?

As to the part that Venus and Juno take in this affair, against which I have heard some people exclaim;—it is to be considered as a poetical figure, of sufficient probability in the days of Virgil; and only signifies, that Dido was ensnared in this unhappy amour, first by her love, and then by her ambition. See her conference with her sister in the beginning of the fourth book. — The reader who loves Virgil as much as I wish him to do, will not be offended at the length of this note.

pathos, and could not have been (what it now is) such a treasure of important knowledge, as no other uninspired writer ever comprehended in so small a compass. — Virtue, like truth, is uniform and unchangeable. We may anticipate the part a good man will act in any given circumstances; and therefore the events that depend on such a man must be less surprising than those that proceed from passion; the vicissitudes whereof it is frequently impossible to foresee. From the violent temper of Achilles, in the Iliad, spring many great incidents; which could not have taken place, if he had been calm and prudent like Ulysses, or pious and patriotic like Eneas: — his rejection of Agamemnon's offers, in the ninth book, arises from the violence of his resentment; — his yielding to the request of Patroclus, in the sixteenth, from the violence of his friendship (if I may so speak) counteracting his resentment; and his restoring to Priam the dead body of Hector, in the twenty-fourth, from the violence of his affection to his own aged father, and his regard to the command of Jupiter, counteracting, in some measure, both his sorrow for his friend, and his thirst of vengeance. — Besides, except where there is some degree of vice, it pains us too exquisitely to see misfortune; and therefore Poetry would cease to have a pleasurable influence over our tender passions, if it were to exhibit virtuous characters only. And as,  
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in life, evil is necessary to our moral probation, and the possibility of error to our intellectual improvement; so bad or mixed characters are useful in poetry, to give to the good such opposition as puts them upon displaying and exercising their virtue.

All those personages, however, in whose fortune the poet means that we should be interested, must have agreeable and admirable qualities to recommend them to our regard. And perhaps the greatest difficulty in the art lies in suitably blending those faults, which the poet finds it expedient to give to any particular hero, with such moral, intellectual, or corporeal accomplishments, as may engage our esteem, pity, or admiration, without weakening our hatred of vice, or love of virtue. In most of our novels, and in many of our plays, it happens unluckily, that the hero of the piece is so captivating, as to incline us to be indulgent to every part of his character, the bad as well as the good. But a great master knows how to give the proper direction to human sensibility, and, without any perversion of our faculties, or any confusion of right and wrong, to make the same person the object of very different emotions, of pity and hatred, of admiration and horror. Who does not esteem and admire Macbeth, for his courage and generosity? who does not pity him when beset with all the terrors of a pregnant imagination, superstitious temper, and  
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awakened conscience? who does not abhor him as a monster of cruelty, treachery, and ingratitude? His good qualities, by drawing us near to him, make us, as it were, eye-witnesses of his crime, and give us a fellow-feeling of his remorse; and, therefore, his example cannot fail to have a powerful effect in cherishing our love of virtue, and fortifying our minds against criminal impressions: whereas, had he wanted those good qualities, we should have kept aloof from his concerns, or viewed them with a superficial attention; in which case his example would have had little more weight, than that of the robber, of whom we know nothing, but that he was tried, condemned, and executed.—Satan, in *Paradise Lost*, is a character drawn and supported with the most consummate judgement. The old furies and demons, Hecate, Tisiphone, Alecto, Megara, are objects of unmixed and unmitigated abhorrence; Tityus, Enceladus, and their brethren, are remarkable for nothing but impiety, deformity, and vastness of size; Pluto is, at best, an insipid personage; Mars, a hairbrained ruffian; Tasso's infernal tyrant, an ugly and overgrown monster:—but in the Miltonic Satan, we are forced to admire the majesty of the ruined archangel, at the same time that we detest the unconquerable depravity of the fiend. But, of all poetical characters, the Achilles

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of Homer\* seems to me the most exquisite in the invention, and the most highly finished. The utility of this character in a moral view is obvious; for it may be considered as the source of all the morality of the Iliad. Had not the generous and violent temper of Achilles determined him to patronise the augur Calchas in defiance of Agamemnon, and afterwards, on being affronted by that vindictive commander, to abandon for a time the common cause of Greece; — the fatal effects of dissension among confederates, and of capricious and tyrannical behaviour in a sovereign, would not have been the leading moral of Homer's poetry; nor could Hector, Sarpedon, Eneas, Ulysses, and the other amiable heroes, have been brought forward to signalize their virtues, and recommend themselves to the esteem and imitation of mankind.

They who form their judgement of Achilles from the imperfect sketch given of him

\* I say, the Achilles of Homer. Latter authors have degraded the character of this hero, by supposing every part of his body invulnerable except the heel. I know not how often I have heard this urged as one of Homer's absurdities; and indeed the whole Iliad is one continued absurdity, on this supposition. But Homer all along makes his hero equally liable to wounds and death with other men. Nay, to prevent all mistakes in regard to this matter, (if those who cavil at the poet would but read his work), he actually wounds him in the right arm, by the lance of Asteropæus, in the battle near the river Scamander. See Il. xxi. vers. 161. — 168.

by Horace in the *Art of Poetry* \*; and consider him only as a hateful composition of anger, revenge, fierceness, obstinacy, and pride, can never enter into the views of Homer, nor be suitably affected with his narration. All these vices are no doubt, in some degree, combined in Achilles; but they are tempered with qualities of a different sort, which render him a most interesting character, and of course make the Iliad a most interesting poem. Every reader abhors the faults of this hero; and yet, to an attentive reader of Homer, this hero must be the object of esteem, admiration, and pity; for he has many good as well as bad affections, and is equally violent in all: — nor is he possessed of a single vice or virtue, which the wonderful art of the poet has not made subservient to the design of the poem, and to the progress and catastrophe of the action; so that the hero of the Iliad, considered as a poetical personage, is just what he should be, neither greater nor less, neither worse nor better. — He is every where distinguished by an abhorrence of oppression, by a liberal and elevated mind, by a passion for glory, and by a love of truth, freedom, and sincerity. He is for the most part attentive to the duties of religion; and, except to those who have injured him, courteous and kind: he is affectionate to his tu-

\* vers. 121. 122.

tor Phenix; and not only pities the misfortunes of his enemy Priam, but in the most soothing manner administers to him the best consolation that poor Homer's theology could furnish. Though no admirer of the cause in which his evil destiny compels him to engage, he is warmly attached to his native land; and, ardent as he is in vengeance, he is equally so in love to his aged father Peleus, and to his friend Patroclus. He is not luxurious like Paris, nor clownish like Ajax; his accomplishments are princely, and his amusements worthy of a hero. Add to this, as an apology for the vehemence of his anger, that the affront he had received was (according to the manners of that age) of the most atrocious nature; and not only unprovoked, but such as, on the part of Agamemnon, betrayed a brutal insensibility to merit, as well as a proud, selfish, ungrateful, and tyrannical disposition. And though he is often inexcuseably furious; yet it is but justice to remark, that he was not naturally cruel\*; and that his wildest outrages were such as in those rude times might be expected from a violent man of invincible strength and valour, when exasperated by

\* See Iliad xxi. 100. and xxiv. 485. — 673. — In the first of these passages, Achilles himself declares, that before Patroclus was slain, he often spared the lives of his enemies, and took pleasure in doing it. It is strange that this should be left out in Pope's Translation.

injury, and frantic with sorrow.—Our hero's claim to the admiration of mankind is indisputable. Every part of his character is sublime and astonishing. In his person, he is the strongest, the swiftest, and most beautiful of men:—this last circumstance, however, occurs not to his own observation, being too trivial to attract the notice of so great a mind. The Fates had put it in his power, either to return home before the end of the war, or to remain at Troy:—if he chose the former, he would enjoy tranquillity and happiness in his own country to a good old age; if the latter, he must perish in the bloom of his youth:—his affection to his father and native country, and his hatred to Agamemnon, strongly urged him to the first; but a desire to avenge the death of his friend determines him to accept the last, with all its consequences. This at once displays the greatness of his fortitude, the warmth of his friendship, and the violence of his sanguinary passions: and it is this that so often and so powerfully recommends him to the pity, as well as admiration, of the attentive reader.—But the magnanimity of this hero is superior, not only to the fear of death, but also to prodigies, and those too of the most tremendous import. I allude to the speech of his horse Xanthus, in the end of the nineteenth book, and to his behaviour on that occasion; and I shall take the liberty to expatiate a little upon that incident, with



a view to vindicate Homer, as well as to illustrate the character of Achilles.

The incident is marvellous, no doubt, and has been generally condemned even by the admirers of Homer; yet to me, who am no believer in the infallibility of the great poet, seems not only allowable, but useful and important. That this miracle has probability enough to warrant its admission into Homer's poetry, is fully proved by Madame Dacier. It is the effect of Juno's power; which if we admit in other parts of the poem, we ought not to reject in this: and in the poetical history of Greece, and even in the civil history of Rome, there are similar fables, which were once in no small degree of credit. But neither M. Dacier, nor any other of the commentators, (so far as I know), has taken notice of the propriety of introducing it in this place, nor of its utility in raising our idea of the hero. — Patroclus was now slain; and Achilles, forgetting the injury he had received from Agamemnon, and frantic with revenge and sorrow, was rushing to the battle, to satiate his fury upon Hector and the Trojans. This was the critical moment on which his future destiny depended. It was still in his power to retire, and go home in peace to his beloved father and native land, with the certain prospect of a long and happy, though inglorious, life: if he went forward to the battle, he might avenge his friend's death upon the enemy,

but his own must inevitably happen soon after. This was the decree of Fate concerning him, as he himself very well knew. But it would not be wonderful, if such an impetuous spirit should forget all this, during the present paroxysm of his grief and rage. His horse, therefore, miraculously gifted by Juno for that purpose, after expressing, in dumb show, the deepest concern for his lord, opens his mouth, and in human speech announces his approaching fate. The fear of death, and the fear of prodigies, are different things; and a brave man, though proof against the one, may yet be overcome by the other. “ I have known a soldier (says Addison) that has entered a breach, affrighted at his own shadow; and look pale upon a little scratching at his door, who the day before had marched up against a battery of cannon \*.” But Achilles, of whom we already knew that he feared nothing human, now shows, what we had not as yet been informed of, and what must therefore heighten our idea of his fortitude, that he is not to be terrified or moved, by the view of certain destruction, or even by the most alarming prodigies. I shall quote Pope’s Translation, which in this place is equal, if not superior, to the original.

Then ceas’d for ever, by the Furies tied,  
His fateful voice. Th’ intrepid chief replied,

\* Spectator, Numb. 12.

With unabated rage : “ So let it be !  
 Portents and prodigies are lost on me.  
 I know my fate ; — to die, to see no more  
 My much-loved parents, and my native shore.  
 Enough : — when Heaven ordains, I sink in night. —  
 Now perish, Troy.” He said, and rush’d to fight.

It is equally a proof of rich invention and exact judgement in Homer, that he mixes some good qualities in all his bad characters, and some degree of imperfection in almost all his good ones. — Agamemnon, notwithstanding his pride, is an able general, and a valiant man, and highly esteemed as such by the greater part of the army. — Paris, though effeminate, and vain of his dress and person, is, however, good-natured, patient of reproof, not destitute of courage, and eminently skilled in music, and other fine arts. — Ajax is a huge giant; fearless rather from insensibility to danger, and confidence in his massy arms, than from any nobler principle; boastful and rough; regardless of the gods, though not downright impious\* : yet there is in his manner some-

\* His natural bluntness appears in that short, but famous address, to Jupiter, in the nineteenth book, when a preternatural darkness hindered him from seeing either the enemy or his own people. The prayer seems to be the effect rather of vexation, than of piety or patriotism. Pope gives a more solemn turn to it, than either Homer’s words, or the character of the speaker, will justify.

—— Lord of earth and air !

O King, O Father, hear my humble prayer, &c.

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thing of frankness and blunt sincerity, which entitle him to a share in our esteem; and he is ever ready to assist his countrymen, to whom he renders good service on many a perilous emergency. — The character of Helen, in spite of her faults, and of the many calamities whereof she is the guilty cause, Homer has found means to recommend to our pity, and almost to our love; and this he does, without seeking to extenuate the crime of Paris, of which the most respectable personages in the poem are made to speak with becoming abhorrence. She is so full of remorse, so ready on every occasion to condemn her past conduct, so affectionate to her friends, so willing to do justice to everybody's merit, and withal so finely accomplished, that she extorts our admiration, as well as that of the Trojan senators. — Menelaus, though sufficiently sensible of the injury he had received, is yet a man of moderation, clemency, and good-nature, a valiant soldier, and a most affectionate brother; but there is a dash of vanity in his composition, and he entertains rather too high an opinion of his own abilities; yet never overlooks or undervalues the merit of others. — Priam would claim unreserved esteem, as well as pity, if it were not for his inexcusable weakness, in gratifying the humour, and by indulgence abetting the crimes, of the most worthless of all his children, to the utter ruin of his people, family, and kingdom.

kingdom. Madame Dacier supposes, that he had lost his authority, and was obliged to fall in with the politics of the times : but of this I find no evidence; on the contrary, he and his unworthy favourite Paris seem to have been the only persons of distinction in Troy, who were averse to the restoring of Helen. Priam's foible (if it can be called by so soft a name), however faulty, is not uncommon, and has often produced calamity both in private and public life. The scripture gives a memorable instance, in the history of the good old Eli. — Sarpedon comes nearer a perfect character, than any other of Homer's heroes; but the part he has to act is short. It is a character, which one could hardly have expected in those rude times: A sovereign prince, who considers himself as a magistrate set up by the people for the public good, and therefore bound in honour and gratitude to be himself their example, and study to excel as much in virtue, as in rank and authority. — Hector is the favourite of every reader; and with good reason. To the truest valour he joins the most generous patriotism. He abominates the crime of Paris: but, not being able to prevent the war, he thinks it his duty to defend his country, and his father and sovereign, to the last. He too, as well as Achilles, foresees his own death; which heightens our compassion, and raises our idea of his magnanimity. In all the relations of  
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private life, as a son, a father, a husband, a brother, he is amiable in the highest degree; and he is distinguished among all the heroes for tenderness of affection, gentleness of manners, and a pious regard to the duties of religion. One circumstance of his character, strongly expressive of a great and delicate mind, we learn from Helen's lamentation over his dead body, That he was almost the only person in Troy, who had always treated her with kindness, and never uttered one reproachful word to give her pain, nor heard others reproach her without blaming them for it. Some tendency to ostentation (which however may be pardonable in a commander in chief), and temporary fits of timidity, are the only blemishes discoverable in this hero; whose portrait Homer appears to have drawn with an affectionate and peculiar attention. And it must convey a favourable idea of the good old bard, as well as of human nature, to reflect, that the same person who was loved and admired three thousand years ago, as a pattern of heroic excellence and manly virtue, is still an object of admiration and love to the most enlightened nations. This is one striking proof, that, notwithstanding the endless vicissitude to which human affairs are liable, the understanding and moral sentiments of men have continued nearly the same in all ages; and that the faculties whereby we distinguish truth and virtue are as really parts of our original nature, and as

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little obnoxious to the caprice of fashion, as our love of life, our senses of seeing and hearing, or the appetites of hunger and thirst. Rectitude of moral principle, and a spirit of good-nature and humanity, are indeed eminently conspicuous in this wonderful poet; whose works, in whatever light we consider them, as a picture of past ages, as a treasure of moral wisdom, as a specimen of the power of human genius, or as an affecting and instructive display of the human mind, are truly inestimable.

By ascribing so many amiable qualities to Hector, and some others of the Trojans, the poet interests us in the fate of that people, notwithstanding our being continually kept in mind, that they are the injurious party. And by thus blending good and evil, virtue and frailty, in the composition of his characters, he makes them the more conformable to the real appearances of human nature, and more useful as examples for our improvement: and at the same time, without hurting verisimilitude, gives every necessary embellishment to particular parts of his poem, and variety, coherence, and animation, to the whole fable. And it may also be observed, that though several of his characters are complex, not one of them is made up of incompatible parts: all are natural and probable, and such as we think we have met with, or might have met with, in our intercourse with mankind.

From the same extensive views of good and evil, in all their forms and combinations, Homer has been enabled to make each of his characters perfectly distinct in itself, and different from all the rest; insomuch that, before we come to the end of the Iliad, we are as well acquainted with his heroes, as with the faces and tempers of our most familiar friends. Virgil, by confining himself to a few general ideas of fidelity and fortitude, has made his subordinate heroes a very good sort of people; but they are all the same, and we have no clear knowledge of any one of them. Achates is faithful, and Gyas is brave, and Cloanthus is brave; and this is all we can say of the matter\*. We see these heroes at a distance, and have some

\* I cannot, however, admit the opinion of those who contend, that there is nothing of character in Virgil. Turnus is a good poetical character, but borrowed from Homer, being an Achilles in miniature. Mezentius is well drawn, and of the poet's own invention: — a tyrant, who, together with impiety, has contracted intolerable cruelty and pride; yet intrepid in the field, and graced with one amiable virtue, sometimes found in very rugged minds, a tender affection to a most deserving son. In the good old King Evander, we have a charming picture of simple manners, refined by erudition, and uncorrupted by luxury. Dido has been already analysed. There is nothing, I think, in Camilla, which might not be expected in any female warrior; but the adventures of her early life are romantic and interesting. The circumstance of her being, when an infant, thrown across a river, tied to a spear, is so very singular, that it would seem to have had a foundation in fact, or in tradition. Something similar is related by Plutarch of King Pyrrhus.

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notion of their shape and size ; but are not near enough to distinguish their features : and every face seems to exhibit the same faint and ambiguous appearance. But of Homer's heroes we know every particular that can be known. We eat, and drink, and talk, and fight with them : we see them in action, and out of it ; in the field, and in their tents and houses : — the very face of the country about Troy, we seem to be as well acquainted with, as if we had been there. Similar characters there are among these heroes, as there are similar faces in every society ; but we never mistake one for another. Nestor and Ulysses are both wise, and both eloquent ; but the wisdom of the former seems to be the effect of experience ; that of the latter, of genius : the eloquence of the one is sweet and copious, but not always to the purpose, and apt to degenerate into story-telling ; that of the other is close, emphatical, and persuasive, and accompanied with a peculiar modesty and simplicity of manner. Homer's heroes are all valiant ; yet each displays a modification of valour peculiar to himself. One is valiant from principle, another from constitution ; one is rash, another cautious ; one is impetuous and headstrong, another impetuous, but tractable ; one is cruel, another merciful ; one is insolent and ostentatious, another gentle and unassuming ; one is vain of his person, another of his strength, and a third of his fa-

mily. — It would be tedious to give a complete enumeration. Almost every species of the heroic character is to be found in Homer.

The *Paradise Lost*, though truly Epic, cannot properly be called an Heroic poem; for the agents in it are not heroes, but beings of a higher order\*. Of these the poet's plan did not admit the introduction of many; but most of those whom he has introduced are well characterised. I have already spoken of his Satan, which is the highest imaginable species of the diabolical character. The inferior species are well diversified, and in each variety distinctly marked: one is slothful, another avaricious, a third sophistical, a fourth furious; and though all are impious, some are more outrageously and blasphemously so, than others. — Adam and Eve, in the state of innocence, are characters well imagined, and well supported; and the different sentiments arising from difference of sex, are traced out with inimitable delicacy, and philosophical propriety. After the fall, he makes them retain the same characters, without any other change than what the transition from innocence to guilt

\* Samson, in the *Agonistes*, is a species of the heroic character not to be found in Homer; distinctly marked, and admirably supported. And Delilah, in the same tragedy, is perhaps a more perfect model of an alluring, insinuating, worthless woman, than any other to be met with in ancient or modern poetry.

might be supposed to produce: Adam has still that pre-eminence in dignity, and Eve in loveliness, which we should naturally look for in the father and mother of mankind. — Of the blessed spirits, Raphael and Michael are well distinguished; the one for affability, and peculiar good-will to the human race; the other for majesty, but such as commands veneration, rather than fear. — We are sorry to add, that Milton's attempt to soar still higher, only shows, that he had already soared as high, as, without being "blasted with excess of light," it is possible for the human imagination to rise.

I have been led further into this subject of poetical characters than I intended to have gone, or than was necessary in the present investigation. For I presume, it was long ago abundantly evident; — that the end of Poetry is to please, and therefore that the most perfect poetry must be the most pleasing; — that what is unnatural cannot give pleasure, and therefore that poetry must be according to nature; — that it must be either according to real nature, or according to nature somewhat different from the reality; — that if, according to real nature, it would give no greater pleasure than history, which is a transcript of real nature; — that greater pleasure is, however, to be expected from it, because we grant it superior indulgence, in regard to fiction, and the choice of words; — and, consequently, that poetry must be,  
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not according to real nature, but according to nature improved to that degree, which is consistent with probability, and suitable to the poet's purpose \*. — And hence it is that we call Poetry, AN IMITATION OF NATURE. — For that which is properly termed *Imitation* has always in it something which is not in the original. If the prototype and transcript be exactly alike; if there be nothing in the one which is not in the other; we may call the latter a representation, a copy, a draught, or a picture, of the former; but we never call it an imitation.

\* Cum mundus sensibilis sit anima rationali dignitate inferior, videtur Poesis hæc humanæ naturæ largiri quæ historia denegat; atque animo umbris rerum utcunque satisfacere, cum solida haberi non possint. Si quis enim rem acutius introspeciat, firmum ex Poesi sumitur argumentum, magnitudinem rerum magis illustrem, ordinem magis perfectum, et varietatem magis pulchram, animæ humanæ complacere, quam in natura ipsa, post lapsum, reperiri ullo modo possit. Quapropter, cum res gestæ, et eventus, qui veræ historiæ subjiciuntur, non sint ejus amplitudinis, in qua anima humana sibi satisfaciat, præsto est Poesis, quæ facta magis heroica confingat. Cum historia vera successus rerum, minime pro meritis virtutum et scelerum narret; corrigit eam Poesis, et exitus, et fortunas, secundum merita, et ex lege Nemeseos, exhibet. Cum historia vera, obvia rerum satietate et similitudine, animæ humanæ fastidio sit; reficit eam Poesis, inexpectata, et varia, et vicissitudinum plena canens. Adeo ut Poesis ista non solum ad delectationem, sed etiam ad animi magnitudinem, et ad mores conferat. Quare et merito etiam divinitatis particeps videri possit; quia animum erigit, et in sublime rapit; rerum simulacra ad animi desideria accommodando, non animum rebus (quod ratio facit et historia) submittendo.

Bacon. *De Aug. Scient.* pag. 168. *Lug. Bat.* 1645.

CHAP.

## C H A P. V.

Further Illustrations.      Of Poetical  
Arrangement.

**I**T was formerly remarked, that the *events* of Poetry must be “more compact, more clearly connected with causes and consequences, and unfolded in an order more flattering to the imagination, and more interesting to the passions,” than the events of history commonly are. This may seem to demand some illustration.

I. Some parts of history interest us much; but others so little, that, if it were not for their use in the connection of events, we should be inclined to overlook them altogether. But all the parts of a poem must be interesting:—Great, to raise admiration or terror; unexpected, to give surprize; pathetic, to draw forth our tender affections; important, from their tendency to the elucidation of the fable, or to the display of human character; amusing, from the agreeable pictures of nature they present us with; or of peculiar efficacy in promoting our moral improvement. And therefore, in forming an Epic or Dramatic Fable, from history or tradition,

dition, the poet must omit every event that cannot be improved to one or other of these purposes.

II. Some events are recorded in history, merely because they are true; though their consequences be of no moment, and their causes unknown. But of all poetical events, the causes ought to be manifest, for the sake of probability; and the effects considerable, to give them importance.

III. A history may be as long as you please; for, while it is instructive and true, it is still a good history. But a poem must not be too long: — first, because to write good poetry is exceedingly difficult, so that a very long poem would be too extensive a work for human life, and too laborious for human ability; — secondly, because, if you would be suitably affected with the poet's art, you must have a distinct remembrance of the whole fable, which could not be, if the fable were very long\*; — and, thirdly, because poetry is addressed to the imagination and passions, which cannot long be kept in violent exercise, without working the mind into a disagreeable state, and even impairing the health of the body. — That, by these three peculiarities of the poetical art, its powers of pleasing are heightened, and consequently its end promoted, is too obvious to require proof.

\* Aristot. Poet. § 7.

IV. The strength of a passion depends in part on the vivacity of the impression made by its object. Distress which we see, we are more affected with than what we only hear of; and, of several descriptions of an affecting object, we are most moved by that which is most lively. Every thing in poetry, being intended to operate on the passions, must be displayed in lively colours, and set as it were before the eyes: and therefore the poet must attend to many minute, though picturesque circumstances, that may, or perhaps must, be overlooked by the historian. Achilles putting on his armour, is described by Homer with a degree of minuteness, which, if it were the poet's business simply to *relate* facts, might appear tedious or impertinent; but which in reality answers a good purpose, that of giving us a distinct image of this dreadful warrior: it being the end of poetical description, not only to *relate* facts, but to *paint* them\*; not merely to inform the

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\* Homer's poetry is always picturesque. Algarotti, after Lucian, calls him the prince of painters. He sets before us the whole visible appearance of the object he describes, so that the painter would have nothing to do but to work after his model. He has more epithets expressive of colour than any other poet I am acquainted with: *black earth*, *wine-coloured ocean*, and even *white milk*, &c. This to the imagination of those readers who study the various colourings of nature is highly amusing, however offensive it may be to the delicacy of certain critics; — whose rules for the use of epithets if

the judgement, and enrich the memory, but to awaken the passions, and captivate the imagination.

we were to adopt, we should take the palm of poetry from Homer, Virgil, and Milton, and bestow it on those simple rhimers, who, because they have no other merit, must be admired for barrenness of fancy, and poverty of language. — An improper use of epithets is indeed a grievous fault. And epithets become improper: — 1. when they add nothing to the sense; or to the picture; — and still more, when, 2. they seem rather to take something from it; — 3. when by their colloquial meanness they debase the subject. — These three faults are all exemplified in the following lines:

The chariot of the King of kings,  
Which *active* troops of angels drew,  
On a strong tempest's *rapid* wings,  
With *most amazing* swiftness flew.

*Tate and Brady.*

4. Epithets are improper, when, instead of adding to the sense, they only exaggerate the sound. Homer's πολυφλοισβοιο θαλασσης contains both an imitative sound, and a lively picture: but Thomson gives us nothing but noise, when he says, describing a thunder storm,

Follows the loosen'd aggravated roar,  
Enlarging, deepening, mingling, peal on peal,  
Crush'd horrible, convulsing heaven and earth.

*Summer.*

The following line of Pope is perhaps liable to the same objection:

Then rustling, crackling, crashing, thunder down.

*Iliad 23.*

5. Epithets are faulty, when they overcharge a verse so as to hurt its harmony, and incumber its motion. — 6. When they darken the sense, by crowding too many thoughts



magination. Not that every thing in poetry is to be minutely described, or that every minute

thoughts together. Both these faults appear in this passage :

Her eyes in liquid light luxurious swim,  
And languish with unutterable love ;  
Heaven's *warm* bloom glows along each *brightening* limb,  
Where fluttering *bland* the veil's *thin mantlings* rove.

Lastly, Epithets are improper, when they recur more frequently, than the genius either of the language or of the composition will admit. For some languages are more liberal of epithets than others, the Italian, for instance, than the English ; and some sorts of verse require a more perfect simplicity than others, those, for example, that express dejection or composure of mind, than those that give utterance to enthusiasm, indignation, and other ardent emotions.

In general, Epithets, that add to the sense, and at the same time assist the harmony, must be allowed to be ornamental, if they are not too frequent. Nor should those be objected to, which give to the expression either delicacy or dignity. And as these qualities do not at all times depend on the same principle, being in some degree determined by fashion, is there not reason for supposing, that the most exceptionable of Homer's epithets, those I mean which he applies to his persons, might in that remote age have had a propriety, whereof at present we have no conception ? The epithets assumed by Eastern kings seem ridiculous to an European ; and yet perhaps may appear significant and solemn to those who are accustomed to hear them in the original language. Let it be observed too, that Homer composed his immortal work at a time when writing was not common ; when people were rather hearers than readers of poetry, and could not often enjoy the pleasure even of hearing it ; and when, consequently, the frequent repetition of

minute description must of necessity be a long one. Nothing has a worse effect, than descriptions too long, too frequent, or too minute; — witness the *Davideis* of Cowley: — and the reader is never so effectually interested in his subject, as when, by means of a few circumstances well selected, he is made to conceive a great many others. From Virgil's *Pulcherrima Dido*, and the following simile of Diana amidst her nymphs\*, our fancy may form for itself a picture of feminine loveliness and dignity more perfect than ever Cowley or Ovid could exhibit in their most elaborate descriptions. Nay, it has been justly remarked by the best critics †, that, in the description of great objects, a certain degree of obscurity, not in the language, but in the picture or notion presented to the mind, has sometimes a happy effect in producing admiration, terror, and other emotions connected with the sublime: — as when the witches in *Macbeth* describe the horrors of their employment by calling it in three words, “A deed WITHOUT A NAME.” — But it is only a great artist,

certain words and phrases, being a help to memory, as well as to the right apprehension of the poet's meaning, would be thought rather a beauty than a blemish. The same thing is observable in some of our old ballads.

\* Virg. *Æneid.* lib. 1. vers. 500.

† Demet. *Phalæc.* § 266. Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful.

who knows when to be brief in description, and when copious; where to light up his landscape with sunshine, and where to cover it with darkness and tempest. To be able to do this, without suffering the narration to languish in its progress, or to run out into an immoderate length; without hurrying us away from affecting objects before our passions have time to operate, or fixing our attention too long upon them,—it will be proper, that the poet confine the action of his poem to a short period of time. But history is subject to no restraints, but those of truth; and, without incurring blame, may take in any length of duration.

V. The origin of nations, and the beginnings of great events, are little known, and seldom interesting; whence the first part of every history, compared with the sequel, is somewhat dry and tedious. But a poet must, even in the beginning of his work; interest the readers, and raise high expectation; not by any affected pomp of style, far less by ample promises or bold professions; but by setting immediately before them some incident, striking enough to raise curiosity, in regard both to its causes and to its consequences. He must therefore take up his story, not at the beginning, but in the middle; or rather, to prevent the work from being too long, as near the end as possible: and afterwards take some proper opportunity to inform us of the preceding events, in the way  
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of narrative, or by the conversation of the persons introduced, or by short and natural digressions.

The action of both the *Iliad* and *Odyſſey* begins about ſix weeks before its concluſion; although the principal events of the war of *Troy* are to be found in the former, and the adventures of a ten years voyage, followed by the ſuppreſſion of a dangerous domeſtic enemy, in the latter. One of the firſt things mentioned by *Homer* in the *Iliad*, is a plague, which *Apollo* in anger ſent into the *Grecian* army commanded by *Agamemnon*, and now encamped before *Troy*. Who this *Agamemnon* was, and who the *Grecians* were; for what reaſon they had come hither; how long the ſiege had laſted; what memorable actions had been already performed, and in what condition both parties now were:—all this, and much more, we ſoon learn from occaſional hints and converſations interſperſed through the poem.

In the *Eneid*, which, though it comprehends the tranſactions of ſeven years, opens within a few months of the concluding event, we are firſt preſented with a view of the *Trojan* fleet at ſea, and no leſs a perſon than *Juno* intereſting herſelf to raiſe a ſtorm for their deſtruction. This excites a curioſity to know ſomething further: who theſe *Trojans* were; whence they had come, and whither they were bound; why they had left their own country, and what had befallen them ſince they

they left it. On all these points, the poet, without quitting the track of his narrative, soon gives the fullest information. The storm rises; the Trojans are driven to Africa, and hospitably received by the Queen of the country; at whose desire their commander relates his adventures.

The action of *Paradise Lost* commences not many days before Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden of Eden, which is the concluding event. This poem, as its plan is incomparably more sublime and more important, than that of either the *Iliad* or *Eneid*, opens with a far more interesting scene: a multitude of angels and archangels shut up in a region of torment and darkness, and rolling on a lake of unquenchable fire. Who these angels are, and what brought them into this miserable condition, we naturally wish to know; and the poet in due time informs us; partly from the conversation of the fiends themselves; and more particularly by the mouth of a happy spirit, sent from heaven to caution the father and mother of mankind against temptation, and confirm their good resolutions by unfolding the dreadful effects of impiety and disobedience.

This poetical arrangement of events, so different from the historical, has other advantages besides those arising from brevity, and compactness of detail: it is obviously more affecting to the fancy, and more alarming to the passions; and, being more  
suitable

suitable to the order and the manner in which the actions of other men strike our senses, is a more exact imitation of human affairs. I hear a sudden noise in the street, and run to see what is the matter. An insurrection has happened, a great multitude is brought together, and something very important is going forward. The scene before me is the first thing that engages my attention; and is in itself so interesting, that for a moment or two I look at it in silence and wonder. By and by, when I get time for reflection, I begin to inquire into the cause of all this tumult, and what it is the people would be at; and one who is better informed than I, explains the affair from the beginning; or perhaps I make this out for myself, from the words and actions of the persons principally concerned.—This is a sort of picture \* of poetical arrangement, both in Epic and Dramatic Composition; and this plan has been followed in narrative odes and ballads both ancient and modern.—The historian pursues a different method. He begins perhaps with an account of the manners of a certain age, and of the political constitution of a certain country; then introduces a particular person, gives the story of his birth, connections, private character, pursuits, dif-

\* This illustration, or something very like it, I think I have read in Batteux's Commentary on Horace's Art of Poetry.

appointments, and of the events that promoted his views, and brought him acquainted with other turbulent spirits like himself; and so proceeds, unfolding, according to the order of time, the causes, principles, and progress of the conspiracy;—if that be the subject which he undertakes to illustrate. It cannot be denied, that this latter method is more favourable to calm information: but the former, compared with it, will be found to have all the advantages already specified, and to be more effectually productive of that mental pleasure which depends on the passions and imagination.

VI. If a work have no determinate end, it has no meaning; and if it have many ends, it will distract by its multiplicity. Unity of design, therefore, belongs in some measure to all compositions, whether in verse or prose. But to some it is more essential than to others; and to none so much as to the higher poetry. In certain kinds of history, there is unity sufficient, if all the events recorded be referred to one person; in others, if to one period of time, or to one people, or even to the inhabitants of one and the same planet. But it is not enough, that the subject of a poetical fable be the exploits of *one person*; for these may be of various and even of opposite sorts and tendencies, and take up longer time, than the nature of poetry can admit:—far less can a regular poem comprehend the affairs of *one period*, or of *one people*:

*ple*:—it must be limited to some *one great action or event*, to the illustration of which all the subordinate events must contribute; and these must be so connected with one another, as well as with the poet's general purpose, that one cannot be changed, transposed, or taken away, without affecting the consistence and stability of the whole \*. In itself an incident may be interesting, a character well drawn, a description beautiful; and yet, if it disfigure the general plan, or if it obstruct or incumber the main action, instead of helping it forward, a correct artist would consider it as but a gaudy superfluity or splendid deformity; like a piece of scarlet cloth sowed upon a garment of a different colour †. Not that all the parts of the fable either are, or can be, equally essential. Many descriptions and thoughts, of little consequence to the plan, may be admitted for the sake of variety; and the poet may, as well as the historian and philosopher, drop his subject for a time, in order to take up an affecting or instructive digression.

The doctrine of poetical digressions and episodes has been largely treated by the critics. I shall only remark, that, in estimating their propriety, three things are to be attended to:—their connection with the fable or subject;—their own peculiar excellence;

\* Aristot. Poet. § 8.

† Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 15. &c.



—and their subserviency to the poet's design.

1. Those digressions, that both arise from and terminate in the subject; like the episode of the angel Raphael in Paradise Lost, and the transition to the death of Cesar and the civil wars in the first book of the Georgic; are the most artful, and if suitably executed claim the highest praise:—those that arise from, but do not terminate in the subject, are perhaps second in the order of merit; like the story of Dido in the Eneid, and the encomium on a country-life in the second book of the Georgic:—those come next, that terminate in, but do not rise from the fable; of which there are several in the third book of the Eneid, and in the Odyssey:—and those, that neither terminate in the fable, nor rise from it, are the least artful; and if they be long, cannot escape censure, unless their beauty be very great.

But, 2. we are willing to excuse a beautiful episode, at whatever expence to the subject it may be introduced. They who can blame Virgil for obtruding upon them the charming tale of Orpheus and Eurydice in the fourth Georgic, or Milton for the apostrophe to light in the beginning of his third book, ought to forfeit all title to the perusal of good poetry; for of such divine strains one would rather be the author, than of all the books of criticism in the world. Yet still it is better, that an episode possess the beauty of connection, together with its own

intrinsic elegance, than this without the other.

Moreover, in judging of the propriety of episodes, and other similar contrivances, it may be expedient to attend, 3. to the *design* of the poet, as distinguished from the fable or subject of the poem. The great design, for example, of Virgil, was to interest his countrymen in a poem written with a view to reconcile them to the person and government of Augustus. Whatever, therefore, in the poem tends to promote this design, even though it should, in some degree, hurt the contexture of the fable, is really a proof of the poet's judgement, and may be not only allowed but applauded. — The progress of the action of the *Eneid* may seem to be too long obstructed, in one place, by the story of Dido, which, though it rises from the preceding part of the poem, has no influence upon the sequel; and, in another, by the episode of Cacus, which, without injury to the *fable*, might have been omitted altogether. Yet these episodes, interesting as they are to us and to all mankind, because of the transcendent merit of the poetry, must have been still more interesting to the Romans, because of their connection with the Roman affairs: for the one accounts poetically for their wars with Carthage; and the other not only explains some of their religious ceremonies, but also gives a most charming rural picture of those hills and vallies in the neighbourhood

bourhood of the Tiber, on which, in after times, their majestic city was fated to stand. — And if we consider, that the design of Homer's Iliad was, not only to show the fatal effects of dissension among confederates, but also to immortalise his country, and celebrate the most distinguished families in it, we shall be inclined to think more favourably than critics generally do, of some of his long speeches and digressions; which, though to us they may seem trivial, must have been very interesting to his countrymen, on account of the genealogies and private history recorded in them. — Shakespeare's Historical Plays, considered as Dramatic fables, and tried by the laws of Tragedy and Comedy, appear very rude compositions. But if we attend to the poet's *design*, (as the elegant critic \* has with equal truth and beauty explained it), we shall be forced to admire his judgement in the general conduct of those pieces, as well as unequalled success in the execution of particular parts.

There is yet another point of view (as hinted formerly) in which these digressions may be considered. If they tend to elucidate any important character, or to introduce any interesting event not otherwise within the compass of the poem, or to give an amiable display of any particular virtue, they

\* Essay on the writings and genius of Shakespeare, pag. 55.

may be intitled, not to our pardon only, but even to our admiration, however loofely they may hang upon the fable. All these three ends are effected by that most beautiful episode of Hector and Andromache in the sixth book of the Iliad; and the two last, by the no less beautiful one of Euryalus and Nifus, in the ninth of the Eneid.

The beauties of poetry are distinguishable into local and universal. The former may reflect great honour on the poet, but the latter are more excellent in themselves; and these chiefly we must be supposed to have in our eye, when we speak of the essential characters of the art. A well-invented fable, as it is one of the most difficult operations of human genius \*, must be allowed to be one of

\* The difficulty of constructing an Epic or Dramatic fable may appear from the bad success of very great writers who have attempted it. Of Dramatic fables there are indeed several in the world, which may be allowed to have come near perfection. But the beauty of Homer's fable remains unrivalled to this day. Virgil and Tasso have imitated, but not equalled it. That of Paradise Lost is artful, and for the most part judicious: I am certain the author could have equalled Homer in this, as he has excelled him in some other respects:—but the nature of his plan would not admit the introduction of so many incidents, as we see in the Iliad, co-operating to one determinate end.—Of the Comic Epopee we have two exquisite models in English, I mean the *Amelia* and *Tom Jones* of Fielding. The introductory part of the latter follows indeed the historical arrangement, in a way somewhat resembling the practice of Euripides in his Prologues, or at least as excuseable: but, with this excep-  
tion,

of the highest beauties of poetry. The *design*, as distinguished from the *fable*, may stand in need of commentators to explain it; but a well-wrought fable is universally understood, and universally pleasing. And if ever a poet shall arise, who to the art of Sophocles and Homer, can join the correctness and delicacy of Virgil, and the energy, variety, and natural colouring of Shakespeare, the world will then see something in poetry more excellent than we can at present conceive.

tion, we may venture to say, that both fables would bear to be examined by Aristotle himself, and, if compared with those of Homer, would not greatly suffer in the comparison. This author, to an amazing variety of probable occurrences, and of characters well drawn, well supported, and finely contrasted, has given the most perfect unity, by making them all co-operate to one and the same final purpose. It yields a very pleasing surprise to observe, in the unravelling of his plots, particularly that of *Tom Jones*, how many incidents, to which, because of their apparent minuteness, we had scarce attended as they occurred in the narrative, are found to have been essential to the plot. And what heightens our idea of the poet's art is, that all this is effected by natural means, and human abilities, without any machinery: — while his great master Cervantes is obliged to work a miracle for the cure of Don Quixote. — Can any reason be assigned, why the inimitable Fielding, who was so perfect in Epic fable, should have succeeded so indifferently in Dramatic? Was it owing to the peculiarity of his genius, or of his circumstances? to any thing in the nature of Dramatic writing in general, or of that particular taste in Dramatic Comedy which Congreve and Vanburgh had introduced, and which he was obliged to comply with?

And

And now, from the position formerly established, that the end of this divine art is, *to give pleasure*, I have endeavoured to prove, that, whether in displaying the appearances of the material universe, or in imitating the workings of the human mind, and the varieties of human character, or in arranging and combining into one whole the several incidents and parts whereof his fable consists, — the aim of the poet must be, to copy Nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection in which, consistently with the particular genius of the work, and the laws of verisimilitude, it may be supposed to be.

Such, in general, is the nature of that poetry which is intended to raise admiration, pity, and other *serious* emotions. But in this art, as in all others, there are different degrees of excellence; and we have hitherto directed our view chiefly to the highest. All serious poets are not equally solicitous to improve nature. Euripides is said to have represented men as they were; Sophocles, more poetically, as they should or might be \*. Theocritus, in his Idyls, and Spenser, in his Shepherd's Calendar, give us language and sentiments more nearly approaching those of the *Rus verum et barbarum* †, than what we meet with in the Pastorals of Virgil and Pope. In the *Historical drama*, human characters and events must be according to hi-

\* Aristot. Poet.

† Martial.

historical truth, or at least not so remote from it, as to lead into any important misapprehension of fact. And in the *Historical Epic poem*, such as the *Pharsalia* of Lucan, and the *Campaign* of Addison, the historical arrangement is preferred to the poetical, as being nearer the truth. Yet nature is a little improved even in these poems. The persons in Shakespeare's Historical Plays, and the heroes of the *Pharsalia*, talk in verse, and suitably to their characters, and with a readiness, beauty, and harmony of expression, not to be met with in real life, nor even in history; speeches are invented, and, to heighten the description, circumstances added, with great latitude; real events are rendered more compact and more strictly dependent upon one another, and fictitious ones brought in, to elucidate human characters, and diversify the narration.

The more poetry improves nature, by copying after general ideas collected from extensive observation, the more it partakes (according to Aristotle) of the nature of philosophy; the greater stretch of fancy and of observation it requires in the artist, and the better chance it has to be universally agreeable. An ordinary painter can give a portrait of a beautiful face: but from a number of such faces to collect a general idea of beauty more perfect than is to be found in any individual, and then to give existence to that idea, by drawing it upon can-

vas, (as Zeuxis is said to have done when he made a famous picture of Helen \*), is a work which one must possess invention and judgement, as well as dexterity, to be able to execute. For it is not by copying the eyes of one lady, the lips of another, and the nose of a third, that such a picture is to be formed; — a medley of this kind would probably be ridiculous, as a certain form of feature may suit one face, which would not suit another: — but it is by comparing together several beautiful mouths, (for example), remarking the peculiar charm of each; and then conceiving an idea of that feature, different perhaps from all, and more perfect than any: and thus proceeding through the several features, with a view, not only to the colour, shape, and proportion, of each part, but also to the harmony of the whole. It rarely happens, that an individual is so complete in any one quality as we could desire; and though it were in the opinion of some, it would not in that of all. A lover may think his mistress a model of perfection; she may have moles and freckles on her face, and an odd cast of her eye; and yet he shall think all this becoming: but another man sees her in a different light; discovers many blemishes perhaps, and but few beauties; thinks her too fat or too lean, too short or too tall. Now, what would be the conse-

\* Plin. Hist. Natur. lib. 35.



quence, if this lady's portrait were to appear in a picture, under the character of Helen or Venus? The lover would admire it; but the rest of the world would wonder at the painter's taste. Great artists have, however, fallen into this error. Rubens, while he was drawing some of his pieces, would seem to have had but two ideas of feminine loveliness; and those were copied from his two wives: all the world approves his conjugal partiality; but his taste in female beauty all the world does not approve.

Individual objects there are, no doubt, in nature, which command universal admiration. There are many women in Great Britain, whose beauty all the world would acknowledge. Nay, perhaps, there are some such in every nation: for, however capricious our taste for beauty may be esteemed by modern philosophers, I have been assured, that in the West Indies a female negro seldom passes for handsome among the blacks, who is not really so in the opinion of the white people. There are characters in real life, which, with little or no heightening, might make a good figure even in Epic poetry: there are natural landscapes, than which one could not desire any thing of the kind more beautiful. But such individuals are not the most common; and therefore, though the rule is not without exceptions, it may, however, be admitted as a rule, That the poet or painter, who means to adapt himself

to the *general* taste, should copy after *general* ideas collected from extensive observation of nature. For the most part, the peculiarities of individuals are agreeable only to individuals; the manners of Frenchmen to Frenchmen; the dress of the season to the beaux and belles of the season; the sentiments and language of Newmarket, to the heroes of the turf, and their imitators. But manners and sentiments, dresses and faces, may be imagined, which shall be agreeable to all who have a right to be pleased: and these it is the business of the imitative artist to invent, and to exhibit.

Yet mere portraits are useful and agreeable: and poetry, even when it falls short of this philosophical perfection, may have great merit as an instrument of both instruction and pleasure. Some minds have no turn to abstract speculation, and would be better pleased with a *notion* of an individual, than with an *idea* of a species\*; or  
with

\* *Idea*, according to the usage of the Greek philosophers, from whom we have the word, signifies, “A thought of the mind which is expressed by a general term.” *Notion* is used by many English writers of credit to signify, “A thought of the mind which may be expressed by a proper or individual name.” Thus, I have a *notion* of London, but an *idea* of a city; a *notion* of a particular hero, but an *idea* of heroism. These two words have long been confounded by the best writers: but it were to be wished, that, as the things are totally different, the names had been so too. Had this  
been

with seeing in an Historical picture or Epic poem, the portraits or characters of their acquaintance, than the same form of face or disposition improved into a general idea \*. And to most men, simple unadorned nature is, at certain times, and in certain compositions, more agreeable, than the most elaborate improvements of art ; as a plain short period, without modulation, gives a pleasing variety to a discourse. Many such portraits of simple nature there are in the subordinate parts both of Homer's and of Virgil's poetry : and an excellent effect they have (as was already observed) in giving probability to the fiction †, as well as in gratifying the reader's fancy with images distinct and lively, and easily comprehended. The historical plays of Shakespear raise not our pity and terror to such a height, as Lear, Mac-

been the case, a great deal of confusion peculiar to modern philosophy, and arising from an ambiguous, and almost unlimited, use of the word *idea*, might have been prevented.

\* An historical picture, like West's *Death of Wolfe*, in which the faces are all portraits of individual heroes, and the dresses according to the present mode, may be more interesting now, than if these had been more picturesque, and those expressive of different modifications of heroism. But in a future age, when the dresses are become unfashionable, and the faces no longer known as portraits, is there not reason to fear, that this excellent piece will lose of its effect ?

† See chap. 3.

beth, or Othello; but they interest and instruct us greatly, notwithstanding. The rudest of the Eclogues of Theocritus, or even of Spenser, have by some authors been extolled above those of Virgil, because more like real life. Nay, Corneille is known to have preferred the Pharsalia to the Eneid, perhaps from its being nearer the truth; or perhaps from the sublime sentiments of Stoical morality so forcibly and so ostentatiously displayed in it.

Poets may refine upon nature too much, as well as too little; for affectation and rusticity are equally remote from true elegance. — The style and sentiments of comedy should no doubt be more correct and more pointed than those of the most polite conversation: but to make every footman a wit, and every gentleman and lady an epigrammatist, as Congreve has done, is an excessive and faulty refinement. The proper medium has been hit by Menander and Terence, by Shakespeare in his happier scenes, and by Garrick, Cumberland, and some others of late renown. — To describe the passion of love with as little delicacy as some men speak of it, would be unpardonable; but to transform it into mere platonic adoration, is to run into another extreme, less criminal indeed, but too remote from universal truth to be universally interesting. To the former extreme Ovid inclines; and Petrarch, and his imitators, to the latter. Virgil

gil has happily avoided both : but Milton has painted this passion, as distinct from all others, with such peculiar truth and beauty, that we cannot think Voltaire's encomium too high, when he says, that love in all other poetry seems a weakness, but in Paradise Lost a virtue. — There are many good strokes of nature in Ramsay's Gentle Shepherd ; but the author's passion for the *Rus verum* betrays him into some indelicacies \* : — a censure that falls with greater weight upon Theocritus, who is often absolutely indecent. The Italian pastoral of Tasso and Guarini, and the French of Fontenelle, run into the opposite extreme, (though in some parts beautifully simple), and display a system of rural manners, so quaint and affected as to outrage all probability. I should oppose several great names, if I were to say, that Virgil has given us the pastoral poem in its most perfect state ; and yet I cannot help being of this opinion, though I have not time at present to specify my reasons. — In fact, though mediocrity of execution in poetry be allowed to deserve the doom

\* The language of this poem has been blamed, on account of its vulgarity. The Scotch dialect is sufficiently rustic, even in its most improved state : but in the Gentle Shepherd it is often debased by a phraseology not to be met with, except among the most illiterate people. Writers on pastoral have not always been careful to distinguish between coarseness and simplicity ; and yet a plain suit of cloaths and a bundle of rags are not more different.

pronounced upon it by Horace \*; yet is it true, notwithstanding, that in this art, as in many other good things, the point of excellence lies in a middle between two extremes; and has been reached by those only who sought to improve nature as far as the genius of their work would permit, keeping at an equal distance from rusticity on the one hand, and affected elegance on the other.

If it were asked, what effects a view of nature degraded, or rendered less perfect than the reality, would produce in poetry; I should answer, The same which caricatura produces in painting;—it would make the piece ludicrous. In almost every countenance, there are some exceptionable features, by heightening the deformity whereof, it is easy to give a ridiculous likeness even of a good face. And in most human characters there are blemishes, moral, intellectual, or corporeal, by exaggerating which *to a certain degree*, you may form a comic character; as by raising the virtues, abilities, or external advantages of individuals, you form Epic or Tragic characters. I say, *to a certain degree*; for if, by their vices, want of understanding, or bodily infirmities, they should raise disgust, pity, or any other important emotion, they are then no longer the objects of comic ridicule; and it is an egregious fault

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 373.

in a writer to attempt to make them so \*. It is a fault, because it proves his judgement to be perverted, and tends to pervert the sentiments, and ruin the morals of mankind.

But is nature always degraded in Comic performances? I answer, No; neither is it always improved, as we remarked already, in serious poetry. Some human characters are so truly heroic, as to raise admiration, without any heightenings of poetical art; and some are so truly laughable, that the comic writer would have nothing to do, but to represent them as they are. Besides, to raise laughter is not always the aim, either of the Epic Comedy †, or of the Dramatic: sublime passions and characters are sometimes introduced; and these may be heightened as much as the poet finds necessary for his purpose, provided that, in his style, he affect no heroical elevation; and that his action, and the rank of his persons, be such as might probably be met with in common life. In regard to fable, and the order of events, all Comedy requires, or at least admits, as great perfection as Epic poetry itself.

\* See Essay on Laughter, chap. 3.

† Of the Epic Comedy, which might perhaps be called rather the *Comic Epopee*, *Tom Jones* and *Amelia* are examples.

## C H A P. VI.

## Remarks on Music,

## S E C T. I.

*Of Imitation. Is Music an Imitative Art?*

**M**AN from his birth is prone to imitation, and takes great pleasure in it. At a time when he is too young to understand or attend to rules, he learns, by imitating others, to speak, and walk, and do many other things equally requisite to life and happiness. Most of the sports of children are imitative, and many of them dramatical. Mimickry occasions laughter; and a just imitation of human life upon the stage is highly delightful to persons of all ranks, conditions, and capacities.

Our natural propensity to imitation may in part account for the pleasure it yields: for that is always pleasing which gratifies natural propensity; nay, to please, and to gratify, are almost synonymous terms. Yet the peculiar charm of imitation may also be accounted for upon other principles. To  
compare



compare a copy with the original, and trace out the particulars wherein they differ and wherein they resemble, is in itself a pleasing exercise to the mind; and, when accompanied with admiration of the object imitated, and of the genius of the imitator, conveys a most intense delight; which may be rendered still more intense by the agreeable qualities of the *instrument* of imitation, — by the beauty of the colours in painting, by the harmony of the language in poetry; and in music, by the sweetness, mellowness, pathos, and other pleasing varieties of vocal and instrumental sound. And if to all this there be added, the merit of a moral design, Imitation will then shine forth in her most amiable form, and the enraptured heart acknowledge her powers of pleasing to be irresistible.

Such is the delight we have in imitation, that what would in itself give neither pleasure nor pain, may become agreeable when well imitated. We see without emotion many faces, and other familiar objects; but a good picture even of a stone, or common plant, is not beheld with indifference. No wonder, then, that what is agreeable in itself, should, when surveyed through the medium of skilful imitation, be highly agreeable. A good portrait of a grim countenance is pleasing; but a portrait equally good of a beautiful one is still more so. Nay, though a man in a violent passion, a mon-

strous wild beast, or a body agonized with pain, be a most unpleasing spectacle, a picture, or poetical description of it, may be contemplated with delight \*; the pleasure we take in the artist's ingenuity, joined to our consciousness that the object before us is not real, being more than sufficient to counterbalance every disagreeable feeling occasioned by the deformity of the figure †. Even human vices, infirmities, and misfortunes, when well represented on the stage,

\* Aristot. Poet. sect. 4.; Gerard on Taste, part 1. sect. 4.

† Pictures, however, of great merit as imitations, and valuable for the morality of the design, may yet be too horrid to be contemplated with pleasure. A robber, who had broke into a repository of the dead, in order to plunder a corpse of some rich ornaments, is said to have been so affected with the hideous spectacle of mortality which presented itself when he opened the coffin, that he flunk away, trembling and weeping, without being able to execute his purpose. I have met with an excellent print upon this subject; but was never able to look at it for half a minute together. Too many objects of the same character may be seen in Hogarth's *Progress of Cruelty*. — There is another class of shocking ideas, which poets have not always been sufficiently careful to avoid. Juvenal and Swift, and even Pope himself, have given us descriptions which it turns one's stomach to think of. And I must confess, that, notwithstanding the authority of Atterbury and Addison, and the general merit of the passage, I could never reconcile myself to some filthy ideas, which, to the unspeakable satisfaction of Mr Voltaire, Milton has unwarily introduced in the famous allegory of Sin and Death.

form

form a most interesting amufement. So great is the charm of imitation.

That has been thought a very myfterious pleasure, which we take in witnessing tragical imitations of human action, even while they move us to pity and sorrow. Several caufes feem to co-operate in producing it.

1. It gives an agreeable agitation to the mind, to be deeply interefted in any event, that is not attended with real harm to ourfelves or others. Nay, certain events of the moft fubftantial diftreffs would feem to give a gloomy entertainment to fome minds: elfe why fhould men run fo eagerly to fee fhipwrecks, executions, riots, and even battles, and fields of flaugter? But the diftreffs upon the ftage neither is, nor is believed to be, real; and therefore the agreeable exercife it may give to the mind is not allayed by any bitter reflections, but is rather heightened by this confideration, that the whole is imaginary. To thofe who miftake it for real, as children are faid to do fometimes, it gives no pleasure, but intenfè pain.
2. Throughout the performance, we admire the genius of the poet, as it appears in the language and fentiments, in the right conduct of the fable, in diversifying and fupporting the characters, and in devising incidents affecting in themfelves, and conducive to the main defign.
3. The ingenuity of the actors muft be allowed to be a principal caufe of the pleasure with which we witness either tragedy

or

or comedy. A bad play well acted may please, and in fact often does; but a good play ill acted is intolerable. 4. We sympathise with the emotions of the audience, and this heightens our own. For I apprehend, that no person of sensibility would chuse to be the sole spectator of a play, if he had it in his power to see it in company with a multitude. When we have read by ourselves a pleasing narrative, till it has lost every charm that novelty can bestow, we may renew its relish by reading it in company, and perhaps be even more entertained than at the first perusal. 5. The ornaments of the theatre, the music, the scenery, the splendor of the company, nay the very dress of the players, must be allowed to contribute something to our amusement: else why do managers expend so much money in decoration? And, lastly, let it be observed, that there is something very peculiar in the nature of pity. The pain, however exquisite, that accompanies this amiable affection, is such, that a man of a generous mind would not disqualify himself for it, even if he could: nor is the "luxury of woe," that we read of in poetry, a mere figure of speech, but a real sensation, wherewith every person of humanity is acquainted, by frequent experience. Pity produces a tenderness of heart very friendly to virtuous impressions. It inclines us to be circumspect and lowly, and sensible of the uncertainty of human things, and of  
our

our dependence upon the great Author of our being; while continued joy and prosperity harden the heart, and render men proud, irreligious, and inattentive: so that Solomon had good reason for affirming, that “by the sadness of the countenance the heart “is made better.” The exercise of pity, even towards imaginary sufferings, cannot fail to give pleasure, if attended, as it generally is, with the approbation of reason and conscience, declaring it to be a virtuous affection, productive of signal benefit to society, and peculiarly suitable to our condition, honourable to our nature, and amiable in the eyes of our fellow-creatures\*.

Since Imitation is so plentiful a source of pleasure, we need not wonder, that the imitative arts of poetry and painting should have been greatly esteemed in every enlightened age. The imitation itself, which is the work of the artist, is agreeable; the thing imitated, which is nature, is also agreeable; and is not the same thing true of the instrument of imitation? Or does any one doubt, whether harmonious language be pleasing to the ear, or certain arrangements of colour beautiful to the eye?

Shall I apply these, and the preceding reasonings, to the Musical Art also, which I

\* Since these remarks were written, Dr Campbell has published a very accurate and ingenious dissertation on this subject. See his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, vol. 1.

have elfewhere called, and which is generally underftood to be, Imitative? Shall I fay, that fome melodies please, becaufe they imitate nature, and that others, which do not imitate nature, are therefore unpleafing? — that an air expreffive of devotion, for example, is agreeable, becaufe it presents us with an imitation of thofe founds by which devotion does naturally exprefs itfelf? — Such an affirmation would hardly pafs upon the reader; notwithstanding the plaufibility it might feem to derive from that ftrict analogy which all the fine arts are fupposed to bear to one another. He would ask, What is the natural found of devotion? Where is it to be heard? When was it heard? What refemblance is there between Handel's *Te Deum*, and the tone of voice natural to a perfon expreffing, by articulate found, his veneration of the Divine Character and Providence? — In fact, I apprehend, that critics have erred a little in their determinations upon this fubject, from an opinion, that Music, Painting, and Poetry, are all imitative arts. I hope at leaft I may fay, without offence, that while this was my opinion, I was always confcious of fome unaccountable confufion of thought, whenever I attempted to explain it in the way of detail to others.

But while I thus infinuate, that Music is not an imitative art, I mean no difrefpect to Aristotle, who feems in the beginning of his

Poetics to declare the contrary. It is not the whole, but *the greater part* of music, which that philosopher calls Imitative; and I agree with him so far as to allow this property to some music, though not to all. But he speaks of the ancient music, and I of the modern; and to one who considers how very little we know of the former, it will not appear a contradiction to say, that the one might have been imitative, though the other is not.

Nor do I mean any disrespect to music, when I would strike it off the list of imitative arts. I allow it to be a fine art, and to have great influence on the human soul: I grant, that, by its power of raising a variety of agreeable emotions in the hearer, it proves its relation to poetry, and that it never appears to the best advantage but with poetry for its interpreter: and I am satisfied, that, though musical genius may subsist without poetical taste, and poetical genius without musical taste; yet these two talents united might accomplish nobler effects, than either could do singly. I acknowledge too, that the principles and essential rules of this art are as really founded in nature, as those of poetry and painting. But when I am asked, What part of nature is imitated in any good picture or poem, I find I can give a definite answer: whereas, when I am asked, What part of nature is imitated in Handel's *Water-music*, for instance, or in Corelli's

*eighth concerto*, or in any particular English song or Scotch tune, I find I can give no definite answer: — though no doubt I might say some plausible things; or perhaps, after much refinement, be able to show, that Music may, by one shift or other, be made an imitative art, provided you allow me to give any meaning I please to the word *imitative*.

Music is imitative, when it readily puts one in mind of the thing imitated. If an explication be necessary, and if, after all, we find it difficult to recognise any exact similitude, I would not call such music an imitation of nature; but consider it as upon a footing, in point of likeness, with those pictures, wherein the action cannot be known but by a label proceeding from the mouth of the agent, nor the species of animal ascertained without a name written under it. But between imitation in music and imitation in painting, there is this one essential difference: — a bad picture is always a bad imitation of nature, and a good picture is necessarily a good imitation; but music may be exactly imitative, and yet intolerably bad; or not at all imitative, and yet perfectly good. I have heard, that the *Pastorale* in the eighth of Corelli's *Concertos* (which appears by the inscription to have been composed for the night of the Nativity) was intended for an imitation of the song of angels hovering above the fields of Bethlehem, and gradually soaring up to heaven. The music,



music, however, is not such as would of itself convey this idea : and, even with the help of the commentary, it requires a lively fancy to connect the various movements and melodies of the piece with the motions and evolutions of the heavenly host; as sometimes flying off, and sometimes returning; singing sometimes in one quarter of the sky, and sometimes in another; now in one or two parts, and now in full chorus. It is not clear, that the author intended any imitation; and whether he did or not, is a matter of no consequence; for the music will continue to please, when the tradition is no more remembered. The harmonies of this *pastorale* are indeed so uncommon, and so ravishingly sweet, that it is almost impossible not to think of heaven when one hears them. I would not call them imitative; but I believe they are finer than any imitative music in the world.

Sounds in themselves can imitate nothing directly but sounds, nor in their motions any thing but motions. But the natural sounds and motions that music is allowed to imitate, are but few. For, first, they must all be consistent with the fundamental principles of the art, and not repugnant either to melody or to harmony. Now, the foundation of all true music, and the most perfect of all musical instruments, is the human voice; which is therefore the prototype of the musical scale, and a standard of musical

found. Noises, therefore, and inharmonious notes of every kind, which a good voice cannot utter without straining, ought to be excluded from this pleasing art: for it is impossible, that those vocal sounds which require any unnatural efforts, either of the singer or speaker, should ever give permanent gratification to the hearer. I say, permanent gratification; for I deny not, that the preternatural screams of an Italian singer may occasion surprise, and momentary amusement: but those screams are not music; they are admired, not for their propriety or pathos, but, like rope-dancing, and the eating of fire, merely because they are uncommon and difficult. — Besides, the end of all genuine music is, to introduce into the human mind certain affections, or susceptibilities of affection. Now, all the affections, over which music has any power, are of the agreeable kind. And therefore, in this art, no imitations of natural sound or motion, but such as tend to inspire agreeable affections, ought ever to find a place. The song of certain birds, the murmur of a stream, the shouts of multitudes, the tumult of a storm, the roar of thunder, or a chime of bells, are sounds connected with agreeable or sublime affections, and reconcilable both with melody and with harmony; and may therefore be imitated, when the artist has occasion for them: but the crowing of cocks, the barking of dogs, the mewling of cats, the grunt-

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ing of swine, the gabbling of geese, the cackling of a hen, the braying of an ass, the creaking of a saw, or the rumbling of a cart-wheel, would render the best music ridiculous. The movement of a dance may be imitated, or the stately pace of an embattled legion; but the hobble of a trotting horse would be intolerable.

There is another sort of imitation by sound, which ought never to be heard, or seen, in music. To express the local elevation of objects by what *we* call *high* notes, and their depression by *low* or *deep* notes, has no more propriety in it, than any other pun. *We* call notes *high* or *low*, with respect of their situation in the written scale. There would have been no absurdity in expressing the highest notes by characters placed at the bottom of the scale or musical line, and the lowest notes by characters placed at the top of it, if custom or accident had so determined. And there is reason to think, that something like this actually obtained in the musical scale of the ancients. At least it is probable, that the deepest or gravest sound was called *Summa* by the Romans, and the shrillest or acutest *Ima*; which might be owing to the construction of their instruments; the string that sounded the former being perhaps highest in place, and that which sounded the latter lowest.—Yet some people would think a song faulty, if the word *heaven* was set to  
what

what we call a *low* note, or the word *bell* to what we call a *high* one.

All these sorts of illicit imitation have been practised, and by those too from whom better things were expected. This abuse of a noble art did not escape the satire of Swift; who, though deaf to the charms of music, was not blind to the absurdity of musicians. He recommended it to Dr Ecclin, an ingenious gentleman of Ireland, to compose a *Cantata* in ridicule of this puerile mimicry. Here we have *motions* imitated, which are the most inharmonious, and the least connected with human affections; as the *trotting*, *ambling*, and *galloping*, of Pegasus; and *sounds* the most unmusical, as *crackling* and *sniveling*, and *rough roystering rustic roaring strains*: the words *high* and *deep* have high and deep notes set to them; a series of short notes of equal lengths are introduced, to imitate *shivering* and *shaking*; an irregular rant of quick sounds, to express *rambling*; a sudden rise of the voice, from a low to a high pitch, to denote *flying above the sky*; a ridiculous run of chromatic divisions on the words *Celia dies*; with other droll contrivances of a like nature. In a word, Swift's *Cantata* alone may convince any person, that music uniformly imitative would be ridiculous. — I just observe in passing, that the satire of this piece is levelled, not at absurd imitation only, but also at some other musical improprieties; such as the idle repetition

tion of the same words, the running of long extravagant divisions upon one syllable, and the setting of words to music that have no meaning.

If I were entitled to suggest any rules in this art, I would humbly propose, (and a great musician and ingenious writer seems to be of the same mind\*), that no imitation should ever be introduced into music purely instrumental. Of vocal melody the expression is, or ought to be, ascertained by the poetry; but the expression of the best instrumental music is ambiguous. In this, therefore, there is nothing to lead the mind of the hearer to recognise the imitation, which, though both legitimate and accurate, would run the risk of being overlooked and lost. If, again, it were so very exact, as to lead our thoughts instantly to the thing imitated, we should be apt to attend to the imitation only, so as to remain insensible to the general effect of the piece. In a word, I am inclined to think, that imitation in an instrumental *concerto* would produce either no effect, or a bad one. The same reasons would exclude it from instrumental *solos*; provided they were such as deserve to be called music: — if they be contrived only to show the dexterity of the performer, imitations, and all possible varieties of sound, may be thrown in *ad libitum*; any thing will

\* Ayison on Musical Expression; p. 57. 60. second edit.

do, that can astonish the audience; but to such fiddling or fingering I would no more give the honourable name of Music, than I would apply that of Poetry to Pope's "Fluttering spread thy purple pinions," or to Swift's *Ode on Ditton and Whiston*.

In vocal music, truly such, the words render the expression determinate, and fix the hearer's attention upon it. Here therefore legitimate imitations may be employed; both because the subject of the song will render them intelligible, and because the attention of the hearer is in no danger of being seduced from the principal air. Yet even here, these imitations must be laid upon the instrumental accompaniment, and by no means attempted by the singer, unless they are expressive, and musical, and may be easily managed by the voice. In the song, which is the principal part, expression should be predominant, and imitations never used at all, except to assist the expression. Besides, the tones of the human voice, though the most pathetic of all sounds, are not suited to the quirks of imitative melody, which will always appear to best advantage on an instrument. In the first part of that excellent song, "Hide me from day's gairish eye," "While the bee with honey'd thigh At her flowery work does sing," "And the waters murmuring," "With such concert as they keep," "Intice the dewy feather'd sleep," — Handel imitates the murmur of

groves and waters by the accompaniment of tenors: in another song of the same *Oratorio*, “ On a plat of rising ground, “ I hear the “ far-off curfew sound, “ Over some wide- “ water’d shore, “ Swinging slow with full- len roar,” — he makes the bass imitate the evening-bell: in another fine song, “ Hush, “ ye pretty warbling choir,” — he accom- panies the voice with a flageolet that imitates the singing of birds: in the “ Sweet bird “ that shun’st the noise of folly,” the chief accompaniment is a German flute imitating occasionally the notes of the nightingale.— Sometimes, where expression and imitation happen to coincide, and the latter is easily managed by the voice, he makes the song itself imitative. Thus, in that song, “ Let “ the merry bells ring round, “ And the “ jocund rebecks sound, “ To many a “ youth and many a maid, “ Dancing in “ the chequer’d shade,” — he makes the voice in the beginning imitate the *sound* of a chime of bells, and in the end the *motion* and gaiety of a dance.

Of these imitations no body will question the propriety. But Handel, notwithstanding his inexhaustible invention, and wonderful talents in the sublime and pathetic, is sub- ject to fits of trifling, and frequently errs in the application of his imitative contrivances. In that song “ What passion cannot music “ raise and quell,” when he comes to the words, “ His listening brethren stood around,

“ And wondering on their faces *fell*,” — the accompanying violoncello *falls* suddenly from a quick and *high* movement to a very *deep* and long note. In another song of the same piece \*, “ Sharp violins proclaim “ Their jealous pangs and desperation, “ Fury, frantic indignation, “ *Depth* of pains “ and *height* of passion, “ For the fair disdainful dame;” — the words “ *Depth* of “ pains and *height* of passion,” are thrice repeated to different keys; and the notes of the first clause are constantly *deep*, and those of the second as regularly *high*. The poet however is not less blameable than the musician. — And many other examples of the same kind might be produced from the works of this great artist †.

What has been said may serve to show both the extent, and the merit of Imitative Music ‡. It extends to those natural sounds and motions only, which are agree-

\* Dryden’s Ode on St Cecilia’s day.

† That pretty pastoral ode of Shakespeare, “ When daisies pied and violets blue,” has been set to music by Mr Leveridge; who makes the singer imitate, not only the note of the cuckoo, (which may be allowed, because easily performed, and perfectly musical), but also the shriek of the owl.

‡ By Imitative Music I must always be understood to mean, that which imitates *natural* sounds and motions. Fugues, and other similar contrivances, which, like echoes, repeat or imitate particular portions of the melody, it belongs not to this place to consider.



able in themselves, consistent with melody and harmony, and associated with agreeable affections and sentiments. Its merit is so inconsiderable, that music purely instrumental is rather hurt than improved by it; and vocal music employs it only as a help to the expression, except in some rare cases, where the imitation is itself expressive as well as agreeable, and at the same time within the power of the human voice.

The best masters lay it down as a maxim, that melody and harmony are not to be deserted, even for the sake of expression itself\*. Expression that is not consistent with these is not *musical* expression; and a composer who does not render them consistent, violates the essential rules of his art †. If we compare

\* Avifon on Musical Expression, page 56.

† Harmony and Melody are as essential to genuine music, as perspective is to painting. However solicitous a painter may be to give expression to the figures in his back ground, he must not strengthen their colour, nor define their outlines, so as to hurt the perspective by bringing them too near. A musician will be equally faulty, if he violate the harmony of his piece, in order to heighten the pathos. There is likewise in poetry something analogous to this. In those poems that require a regular and uniform versification, a poet may perhaps, in some rare instances, be allowed to break through the rules of his verse, for the sake of rendering his numbers more emphatical. Milton at least is intitled to take such a liberty :

————— Eternal wrath

Burn'd after them to the bottomless pit.

*Parad. Lost.*

pare Imitation with Expression, the superiority of the latter will be evident. Imitation without Expression is nothing: Imitation detrimental to Expression is faulty: Imitation is never tolerable, at least in serious music, except it promote and be subservient to Expression. If then the highest excellence may be attained in instrumental music, without imitation; and if, even in vocal music, imitation have only a secondary merit; it must follow, that the imitation of nature is not essential to this art; though sometimes, when judiciously employed, it may be ornamental.

Different passions and sentiments do indeed give different tones and accents to the

And Virgil :

Proluit infano contorquens vortice fylvas  
Fluviorum rex Eridanus. ————— *Geor. i.*

And Homer :

Δια μὲν ἀσπίδος ἦλθε φαεινῆς ὀμβριμον ἔγχος. *Iliad iii.*

But these licences must not be too glaring: and therefore I know not whether Dyer is not blameable for giving us, in order to render his numbers imitative, a Trochaic verse of four feet and an half, instead of an Iambic of five :

The pilgrim oft  
At dead of night, midst his oraison hears  
Aghast the voice of Time; disparting towers  
*Tumbling all precipitate, down dash'd,*  
Rattling around, &c. *Ruins of Rome.*

human

human voice. But can the tones of the most pathetic melody be said to bear a resemblance to the voice of a man or woman speaking from the impulse of passion?—The *flat key*, or *minor mode*, is found to be well adapted to a melancholy subject; and, if I were disposed to refine upon the imitative qualities of the art, I would give this for a reason, that melancholy, by depressing the spirits, weakens the voice, and makes it rise rather by *minor thirds*, which consist of but four semi-tones, than by *major thirds*, which consist of five. But is not this reason more subtle than solid? Are there not melancholy airs in the *sharp key*, and chearful ones in the *flat*? Nay, in the same air, do we not often meet with a transition from the one key to the other, without any sensible change in the expression?

Courage is apt to vent itself in a strong tone of voice: but can no musical strains inspire fortitude, but such as are sonorous? The Lacedemonians did not think so; otherwise they would not have used the music of soft pipes when advancing to battle\*. If it be objected, that the firm deliberate valour, which the Spartan music was intended to inspire, does not express itself in a blustering, but rather in a gentle accent, resembling the music of soft pipes, I would recommend it to the objector to chuse, from

\* Aulus Gellius, lib. 1. cap. 11.

all the music he is acquainted with, such an air as he thinks would most effectually awaken his courage; and then consider, how far that animating strain can be said to resemble the accent of a commander complimenting his troops after a victory, or encouraging them before it. Shakspeare speaks of the “spirit-stirring drum;” and a most emphatical epithet it must be allowed to be. But why does the drum excite courage? Is it because the *sound* imitates the voice of a valiant man? or does the *motion* of the drum-sticks bear any similitude to that of his legs or arms?

Many Christians (I wish I could say *all*) know to their happy experience, that the tones of the organ have a wonderful power in raising and animating devout affections. But will it be said, that there is any resemblance between the sound of that noble instrument, or the finest compositions that can be played on it, and the voice of a human creature employed in an act of worship?

One of the most affecting styles in music is the *Pastoral*. Some airs put us in mind of the country, of “rural sights and rural sounds,” and dispose the heart to that chearful tranquillity, that pleasing melancholy, that “vernal delight,” which groves and streams, flocks and herds, hills and vallies, inspire. But of what are these pastoral airs imitative? Is it of the murmur of waters, the warbling of groves, the lowing of herds,  
the

the bleating of flocks, or the echo of vales and mountains? Many airs are pastoral, which imitate none of these things. What then do they imitate? — the songs of ploughmen, milkmaids, and shepherds? Yes: they are such, as we think we have heard, or might have heard, sung by the inhabitants of the country. Then they must *resemble* country-songs; and if so, these songs must also be in the pastoral style. Of what then are these country-songs, the supposed archetypes of pastoral music, imitative? Is it of other country-songs? This shifts the difficulty a step backward, but does not by any means take it away. Is it of rural sounds, proceeding from things animated, or from things inanimate? or of rural motions — of men, beasts, or birds? of winds, woods, or waters? — In a word, an air may be pastoral, and in the highest degree pleasing, which imitates neither sound nor motion, nor any thing else whatever.

After all, it must be acknowledged, that there is some relation at least, or analogy, if not similitude, between certain musical sounds, and mental affections. Soft music may be considered as analogous to gentle emotions; and loud music, if the tones are sweet and not too rapid, to sublime ones; and a quick succession of noisy notes, like those we hear from a drum, seems to have some relation to hurry and impetuosity of passion. Sometimes, too, there is from nature,

ture, and sometimes there comes to be from custom, a connection between certain musical instruments, and certain places and occasions. Thus a flute, hautboy, or bagpipe, is better adapted to the purposes of rural music, than a fiddle, organ, or harpsichord, because more portable, and less liable to injury from the weather: thus an organ, on account both of its size and loudness, requires to be placed in a church, or some large apartment: thus violins and violoncellos, to which any degree of damp may prove hurtful, are naturally adapted to domestic use; while drums and trumpets, fifes and french-horns, are better suited to the service of the field. Hence it happens, that particular tones and modes of music acquire such a connection with particular places, occasions, and sentiments, that by hearing the former we are put in mind of the latter, so as to be affected with them more or less, according to the circumstances. The sound of an organ, for example, puts one in mind of a church, and of the affections suitable to that place; military music, of military ideas; and flutes and hautboys, of the thoughts and images peculiar to rural life. This may serve in part to account for musical expressiveness or efficacy; that is, to explain how it comes to pass, that certain passions are raised, or certain ideas suggested, by certain kinds of music: but this does not prove music to be an imitative art, in the

same sense wherein painting and poetry are called imitative. For between a picture and its original; between the ideas suggested by a poetical description and the objects described, there is a strict similitude: but between soft music and a calm temper there is no strict similitude; and between the sound of a drum or of an organ and the affection of courage or of devotion, between the music of flutes and a pastoral life, between a concert of violins and a cheerful company, there is only an accidental connection, formed by custom, and founded rather on the nature of the instruments, than on that of the music.

It may perhaps be thought, that man learned to sing by imitating the birds; and therefore, as vocal music is allowed to have been the prototype of instrumental, that the whole art must have been essentially imitative. Granting the fact, this only we could infer from it, that the art was imitative at first: but that it still continues to be so, does not follow; for it cannot be said, either that the style of our music resembles that of birds, or that our musical composers make the song of birds the model of their compositions. But it is vain to argue from hypothesis: and the fact before us, though taken for granted by some authors, is destitute of evidence, and plainly absurd. How can it be imagined, that mankind learned to sing by imitating the feathered race? I would as soon suppose, that we learned to speak by imitating

the neigh of a horse, or to walk by observing the motion of fishes in water; or that the political constitution of Great Britain was formed upon the plan of an ant-hillock. Every musician, who is but moderately instructed in the principles of his art, knows, and can prove, that, in the *sharp series* at least, the divisions of the diatonic scale, which is the standard of human music, are no artificial contrivance, but have a real foundation in nature: but the singing of birds, if we except the cuckoo and one or two more, is not reducible to that scale, nor to any other that was ever invented by man; for birds diversify their notes by intervals which the human organs cannot imitate without unnatural efforts, and which therefore it is not to be supposed that human art will ever attempt to express by written symbols. In a word, it is plain, that nature intended one kind of music for men, and another for birds: and we have no more reason to think, that the former was derived by imitation from the latter, than that the nests of a rookery were the prototype of the Gothic architecture, or the combs in a bee-hive of the Grecian.

Music, therefore, is pleasing, not because it is imitative, but because certain melodies and harmonies have *an aptitude* to raise certain passions, affections, and sentiments in the soul. And, consequently, the pleasures we derive from melody and harmony are seldom



dom or never resolvable into that delight which the human mind receives from the imitation of nature.

All this, it may be said, is but a dispute about a word. Be it so: but it is, notwithstanding, a dispute somewhat material both to art and to science. It is material, in science, that philosophers have a determined meaning to their words, and that things be referred to their proper classes. And it is of importance to every art, that its design and end be rightly understood, and that artists be not taught to believe that to be essential to it, which is only adventitious, often impertinent, for the most part unnecessary, and at best but ornamental.

## S E C T. II.

*How are the pleasures we derive from Music to be accounted for?*

IT was said, that certain melodies and harmonies have *an aptitude* to raise certain passions, affections, and sentiments, in the human soul. Let us now inquire a little into the nature of this *aptitude*; by endeavouring, from acknowledged principles of the human constitution, to explain the cause of that pleasure which mankind derive from

music. I am well aware of the delicacy of the argument, and of my inability to do it justice; and therefore I promise no complete investigation, nor indeed any thing more than a few cursory remarks. As I have no theory to support, and as this topic, though it may amuse, is not of any great utility, I shall be neither positive in my assertions, nor abstruse in my reasoning.

The vulgar distinguish between the sense of hearing, and that faculty by which we receive pleasure from music, and which is commonly called a *musical ear*. Every body knows, that to hear, and to have a relish for melody, are two different things; and that many persons have the first in perfection, who are destitute of the last. The last is indeed, like the first, a gift of nature; and may, like other natural gifts, languish if neglected, and improve exceedingly if exercised. And though every person who hears, might no doubt, by instruction and long experience, be made sensible of the musical properties of sound, so far as to be in some measure gratified with good music and disgusted with bad; yet both his pain and his pleasure would be very different in kind and degree, from that which is conveyed by a true musical ear.

I. Does not part of the pleasure, both of melody and of harmony, arise from the very nature of the notes that compose it? Certain inarticulate sounds, especially when  
continued,

continued, produce very pleasing effects on the mind. They seem to withdraw the attention from the more tumultuous concerns of life, and, without agitating the soul, to pour gradually upon it a train of softer ideas, that sometimes lull and soothe the faculties, and sometimes quicken sensibility, and stimulate the imagination. Nor is it altogether absurd to suppose, that the human body may be mechanically affected by them. If in a church one feels the floor, and the pew, tremble to certain tones of the organ; if one string vibrates of its own accord when another is sounded near it of equal length, tension, and thickness; if a person who sneezes, or speaks loud, in the neighbourhood of a harpsichord, often hears the strings of the instrument murmur in the same tone; we need not wonder, that some of the finer fibres of the human frame should be put in a tremulous motion, when they happen to be in unison with any notes proceeding from external objects. — That certain bodily pains might be alleviated by certain sounds, was believed by the Greeks and Romans: and we have it on the best authority, that one species at least of madness was once curable by melody\*. I have seen even instrumental music of little expression draw tears from those who had no knowledge of the art, nor any particular relish for it. Nay, a friend of mine,

\* First book of Samuel, chap. xvi. vers. 23.

who is profoundly skilled in the theory of music, well acquainted with the animal economy, and singularly accurate in his inquiries into nature, assures me, that he has been once and again wrought into a feverish fit by the tones of an Eolian harp. These, and other similar facts that might be mentioned, are not easily accounted for, unless we suppose, that certain sounds may have a mechanical influence upon certain parts of the human body.—Be that however as it will, it admits of no doubt, that the mind may be agreeably affected by mere sound, in which there is neither meaning nor modulation; not only by the tones of the Eolian harp, and other musical instruments, but also by the murmur of winds, groves, and water-falls\*; nay by the shouts of multitudes, by the uproar of the ocean in a storm; and, when one can listen to it without fear, by that “deep and dreadful organ-pipe,” the thunder itself.

Nothing is more valued in a musical instrument or performer, than sweetness, fullness, and variety of tone. Sounds are disagreeable, which hurt the ear by their shrillness, or which cannot be heard without pain-

\* *Quæ tibi, quæ tali reddam pro carmine dona ?  
Nam neque me tantum venientis sibilus austri,  
Nec percussa juvant fluctu tam littora, nec quæ  
Saxofas inter decurrunt flumina valles.*

*Virg. Eclog. 5.*

ful attention on account of their exility. But *loud* and *mellow* sounds, like those of thunder, of a storm, and of the full organ, elevate the mind through the ear; even as vast magnitude yields a pleasing astonishment, when contemplated by the eye. By suggesting the idea of great power, and sometimes of great expansion too, they excite a pleasing admiration, and seem to accord with the lofty genius of that soul whose chief desire is for truth, virtue, and immortality, and the object of whose most delightful meditation is the greatest and best of Beings\*. *Sweetness* of tone, and beauty of shape and colour, produce a placid acquiescence of mind, accompanied with some degree of joy, which plays in a gentle smile upon the countenance of the hearer and beholder. *Equable* sounds, like smooth and level surfaces, are in general more pleasing than such as are rough, uneven, or interrupted; yet, as the flowing curve, so essential to elegance of figure, and so conspicuous in the outlines of beautiful animals, is delightful to the eye; so notes *gradually swelling*, and *gradually decaying*, have an agreeable effect on the ear, and on the mind; the former tending to rouse the faculties, and the latter to compose them; the one promoting gentle exercise, and the other rest.

\* See Longinus, sect. 34. Spectator, N<sup>o</sup> 413. Pleasures of Imagination, book 1. vers. 151. &c.

But of all sounds, that which makes its way most directly to the human heart, is the human voice: and those instruments that approach nearest to it are in expression the most pathetic, and in tone the most perfect. The notes of a man's voice, well tuned and well managed, have a mellowness, variety, and energy, beyond those of any instrument; and a fine female voice, modulated by sensibility, is beyond comparison the sweetest, and most melting sound, in art or nature. Is it not strange, that the most musical people upon earth, dissatisfied, as it would seem, with both these, should have incurred a dreadful reproach, in order to introduce a third species of vocal sound, that has not the perfection of either? For may it not be affirmed with truth, that no person of uncorrupted taste ever heard for the first time the music I allude to, without some degree of horror; proceeding not only from the disagreeable ideas suggested by what was before his eyes, but also from the thrilling sharpness of tone that startled his ear? Let it not be said, that by this abominable expedient, choruses are rendered more complete, and melodies executed, which before were impracticable. Nothing that shocks humanity ought to have a place in human art; nor can a good ear be gratified with unnatural sound, or a good taste with too intricate composition. Surely, every lover of music, and of mankind, would wish to

see a practice abolished which is in itself a disgrace to both; and, in its consequences, so far from being desirable, that it cannot truly be said to do any thing more than to debase a noble art into trick and grimace, and make the human breath a vehicle, not to human sentiments, but to mere empty screaming and squalling.

II. Some notes, when sounded together, have an agreeable, and others a disagreeable effect. The former are *concord*s, the latter *discord*s. When the fluctuations of air produced by two or more contemporary notes do mutually coincide, the effect is agreeable; when they mutually repel each other, the effect is disagreeable. These coincidences are not all equally perfect; nor these repulsions equally strong: and therefore all *concord*s are not equally sweet, nor all *discord*s equally harsh. A man unskilled in music might imagine, that the most agreeable harmony \* must be made up of the sweetest *concord*s, without any mixture of *discord*: and in like manner, a child might fancy, that a feast of sweet-meats would prove the most delicious banquet. But both would be mistaken. The same *concord* may be more or less pleasing, according to its position; and

\* *Melody*, in the language of art, is the agreeable effect of a single series of musical tones: *Harmony* is the agreeable effect of two or more series of musical tones sounded at the same time.

the sweeter concords often produce their best effect, when they are introduced by the harsher ones, or even by discords; for then they are most agreeable, because they give the greatest relief to the ear: even as health is doubly delightful after sickness, liberty after confinement, and a sweet taste when preceded by a bitter. Dissonance, therefore, is necessary to the perfection of harmony. But consonance predominates; and to such a degree, that, except on rare occasions, and by a nice ear, the discord in itself is hardly perceptible.

Musicians have taken pains to discover the principles on which concords and discords are to be so arranged as to produce the best effect; and have thus brought the whole art of harmony within the compass of a certain number of rules, some of which are more, and others less indispensable. These rules admit not of demonstrative proof: for though some of them may be inferred by rational deduction from the very nature of sound; yet the supreme judge of their propriety is the human ear. They are, however, founded on observation so accurate and so just, that no artist ever thought of calling them in question. Rousseau indeed somewhere insinuates, that habit and education might give us an equal relish for a different system of harmony; a sentiment which I should not have expected from an author, who for the most part recommends an implicit confidence



confidence in our natural feelings, and who certainly understands human nature well, and music better than any other philosopher. That a bass of *sevenths* or *fourths*, or even of *fifths*, should ever become so agreeable to any human ear, as one constructed according to the system, is to me as inconceivable, as that Virgil, though turned into rugged prose, would be read and admired as much as ever. Rousseau could not mean to extend this remark to the whole system, but only to some of its mechanical rules : and indeed it must be allowed, that in this, as well as in other arts, there are rules which have no better foundation than fashion, or the practice of some eminent composer.

Natural sensibility is not taste, though it be necessary to it. A painter discovers both blemishes and beauties in a picture, in which an ordinary eye can perceive neither. In poetical language, and in the arrangement and choice of words, there are many niceties, whereof they only are conscious who have practised versification, as well as studied the works of poets, and the rules of the art. In like manner, harmony must be studied a little in its principles by every person who would acquire a true relish for it; and nothing but practice will ever give that quickness to his ear which is necessary to enable him to enter with adequate satisfaction, or rational dislike, into the merits or demerits of a musical performance. When once

he can attend to the progress, relations, and dependencies, of the several parts; and remember the past, and anticipate the future, at the same time he perceives the present; so as to be sensible of the skill of the composer, and dexterity of the performer;—a regular concerto, well executed, will yield him high entertainment, even though its regularity be its principal recommendation. The pleasure which an untutored hearer derives from it is far inferior: and yet there is something in harmony that pleases, and in dissonance that offends, every ear; and were a piece to be played consisting wholly of discords, or put together without any regard to rule, I believe no person whatever would listen to it without great disgust.

After what has been briefly said of the agreeable qualities of musical notes, it will not seem strange, that a piece, either of melody or of harmony, of little or no expression, should, when elegantly performed, give some delight; not only to adepts, who can trace out the various contrivances of the composer, but even to those who have little or no skill in this art, and must therefore look upon the whole piece as nothing more than a combination of pleasing sounds.

III. But Pathos, or Expression, is the chief excellence of music. Without this, it may amuse the ear, it may give a little exercise to the mind of the hearer, it may for a moment withdraw the attention from the  
anxieties

anxieties of life, it may show the performer's dexterity, the skill of the composer, or the merit of the instruments; and in all or any of these ways, it may afford a slight pleasure: but, without engaging the affections, it can never yield that permanent, useful, and heart-felt gratification, which legislators, civil, military, and ecclesiastical, have expected from it. Is it absurd to ascribe utility, and permanence, to the effects produced by this noble art? Let me expatiate a little in its praise. — Did not one of the wisest, and least voluptuous, of all ancient legislators, give great encouragement to music\*? — Does not a most judicious author ascribe the humanity of the Arcadians to the influence of this art, and the barbarity of their neighbours the Cynethians to their neglect of it †? — Does not Montesquieu, one of the first names in modern philosophy, prefer it to all other amusements, as being that which least corrupts the soul ‡? — Quintilian is very copious in the praise of music; and extols it as an incentive to valour, as an instrument of moral and intellectual discipline, as an auxiliary to science, as an object of attention to the wisest men, and a source of comfort and an assistant in

\* Lycurgus. See Plutarch.

† Polybius. Hist. lib. 4.

‡ Esprit des loix, liv. 4. ch. 8.

labour, even to the meanest\*. The heroes of ancient Greece were ambitious to excel in music; and it is recorded of Themistocles, as something extraordinary, that he was not. Socrates appears to have had checks of conscience for neglecting to accomplish himself in this art; for he tells Cebes, a little before he swallowed the deadly draught, that he had all his life been haunted with a dream, in which one seemed to say to him, “O Socrates, compose and practise music;” in compliance with which admonition he amused himself while under sentence of death, with turning some of Esop’s fables into verse, and making a hymn in honour of Apollo, — the only sort of harmonious composition that was then in his power †. In armies, music has always been cultivated as a source of pleasure, a principle of regular motion, and an incentive to valour and enthusiasm. The Son of Sirach declares the ancient poets and musicians to be worthy of honour, and ranks them with the benefactors of mankind ‡. Nay, Jesus Christ and his apostles were pleased to introduce this art into the Christian worship; and the church has in every age followed the example.

Music, however, would not have recom-

\* Inst. Orat. lib. 1. cap. 8.

† Plat. Phædon. sect. 4.

‡ Ecclesiasticus, xliv. 1. — 8.

mended itself so effectually to general esteem, if it had always been merely instrumental. For, if I mistake not, the expression of music without poetry is vague and ambiguous; and hence it is, that the same air may sometimes be repeated to every stanza of a long ode or ballad. The change of the poet's ideas, provided the subject continue nearly the same, does not always require a change of the music: and if critics have ever determined otherwise, they were led into the mistake, by supposing, what every musician knows to be absurd, that, in fitting verses to a tune, or a tune to verses, it is more necessary, that *particular words* should have *particular notes* adapted to them, than that the *general tenor* of the music should accord with the *general nature* of the sentiments.

It is true, that to a favourite air, even when unaccompanied with words, we do commonly annex certain ideas, which may have come to be related to it in consequence of some accidental associations: and sometimes we imagine a resemblance (which however is merely imaginary) between certain melodies and certain thoughts or objects. Thus a Scotchman may fancy, that there is some sort of likeness between that charming air which he calls *Tweedside*, and the scenery of a fine pastoral country: and to the same air, even when only played on an instrument, he may annex the ideas of romantic love and rural tranquillity; because these  
form

form the subject of a pretty little ode, which he has often heard sung to that air. But all this is the effect of habit. A foreigner, who hears that tune for the first time, entertains no such fancy. The utmost we can expect from him is, to acknowledge the air to be sweet and simple. He would smile, if we were to ask him, whether it bears any resemblance to the hills, groves, and meadows, adjoining to a beautiful river; nor would he perhaps think it more expressive of romantic love, than of conjugal, parental, or filial affection, tender melancholy, moderate joy, or any other gentle passion. Certain it is, that on any one of these topics, an ode might be composed, which would suit the air most perfectly. So ambiguous is musical expression.

It is likewise true, that music merely instrumental does often derive significancy from external circumstances. When an army in battle-array is advancing to meet the enemy, words are not necessary to give meaning to the military music. And a solemn air on the organ, introducing or dividing the church-service, may not only elevate the mind, and banish impertinent thoughts, but also, deriving energy from the surrounding scene, may promote religious meditation.

Nor can it be denied, that instrumental music may both quicken our sensibility, and give a direction to it; that is, may both prepare the mind for being affected, and de-

termine it to one set of affections rather than another; — to melancholy, for instance, rather than merriment, composure rather than agitation, devotion rather than levity, and contrariwise. Certain tunes, too, there are, which, having been always connected with certain actions, do, merely from the power of habit, dispose men to those actions. Such are the tunes commonly used to regulate the motions of dancing.

Yet it is in general true, that Poetry is the most immediate and most accurate interpreter of Music. Without this auxiliary, a piece of the best music, heard for the first time, might be said to mean something, but we should not be able to say what. It might incline the heart to sensibility: but poetry, or language, would be necessary to improve that sensibility into a real emotion, by fixing the fancy upon some definite and affecting ideas. A fine instrumental symphony well performed, is like an oration delivered with propriety, but in an unknown tongue; it may affect us a little, but conveys no determinate feeling; we are alarmed, perhaps, or melted, or soothed, but it is very imperfectly, because we know not why: — the singer, by taking up the same air, and applying words to it, immediately translates the oration into our own language; then all uncertainty vanishes, the fancy is filled with determinate ideas, and determinate emotions take possession of the heart.

A great part of our fashionable music seems intended rather to tickle and astonish the hearers, than to inspire them with any permanent emotions. And if that be the end of the art, then, to be sure, this fashionable music is just what it should be, and the simpler strains of former ages are good for nothing. Nor am I now at leisure to inquire, whether it be better for an audience to be thus tickled and astonished, than to have their fancy impressed with beautiful images, and their hearts melted with tender passions, or elevated with sublime ones. But if you grant me this one point, that music is more or less perfect, in proportion as it has more or less power over the heart, it will follow, that all music merely instrumental, and which does not derive significance from any of the associations, habits, or outward circumstances, above mentioned, is to a certain degree imperfect; and that, while the rules hinted at in the following queries are overlooked by composers and performers, vocal music, though it may astonish mankind, or afford them a slight gratification, will never be attended with those important effects that we know it produced of old in the days of simplicity and true taste.

1. Is not good music set to bad poetry as unexpressive, and therefore as absurd, as good poetry set to bad music, or as harmonious language without meaning? Yet the generality of musicians appear to be indiffer-

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ent in regard to this matter. If the found of the words be good, or the meaning of particular words agreeable; if there be a competency of hills and rills, doves and loves, fountains and mountains, with a tolerable collection of garlands and lambkins, nymphs and cupids, *bergerès* and *tortorellas*, they are not solicitous about sense or elegance. In which they seem to me to consult their own honour as little as the rational entertainment of others. For what is there to elevate the mind of that composer, who condemns himself to set music to insipid doggerel? Handel's genius never soared to heaven, till it caught strength and fire from the strains of inspiration.—— 2. Should not the words of every song be intelligible to those to whom it is addressed, and be distinctly articulated, so as to be heard as plainly as the notes? Or can the human mind be rationally gratified with that which it does not perceive, or which, if it did perceive, it would not understand? And therefore, is not the music of a song faulty, when it is so complex as to make the distinct articulation of the words impracticable?—— 3. If the singer's voice and words ought to be heard in every part of the song, can there be any propriety in noisy accompaniments? And as every performer in a numerous band is not perfectly discreet, and as some performers may be more careful to distinguish themselves than do justice to the song, will not an instru-

mental accompaniment be almost necessarily too noisy, if it is complex? — 4. Does not the frequent repetition of the same words in a song, confound its meaning, and distract the attention of both the singer and the hearer? And are not long-winded divisions (or successions of notes warbled to one syllable) attended with a like inconvenience, and with this additional bad effect, that they disqualify the voice for expression, by exhausting it? Is not simplicity as great a perfection in music, as in painting and poetry? Or should we admire that orator who chose to express by five hundred words, a sentiment that might be more emphatically conveyed in five? — 5. Ought not the singer to bear in mind, that he has sentiments to utter as well as sounds? And if so, should he not perfectly understand what he says, as well as what he sings; and not only modulate his notes with the art of a musician, but also pronounce his words with the propriety of a public speaker? If he is taught to do this, does he not learn of course to avoid all grimace and finical gesticulation? And will he not then acquit himself in singing like a rational creature, and a man of sense? Whereas, by pursuing a contrary conduct, is he not to be considered rather as a puppet or wind-instrument, than as an elegant artist? — 6. Is not church-music more important than any other? and ought it not for that reason to be most intelligible and

and expressive? But will this be the case, if the notes are drawn out to such an immoderate length, that the words of the singer cannot be understood? Besides, does not excessive slowness, in singing or speaking, tend rather to wear out the spirits, than to elevate the fancy, or warm the heart? It would seem, then, that the vocal part of church-music should never be so slow as to fatigue those who sing, or to render the words of the song in any degree unintelligible to those who hear. — 7. Do flourished cadences, whether by a voice or instrument, serve any other purpose, than to take off our attention from the subject, and set us a-staring at the flexibility of the performer's voice, the swiftness of his fingers, or the sound of his fiddle? And if this be their only use, do they not counteract, instead of promoting, the chief end of music? What should we think, if a tragedian, at the conclusion of every scene, or of every speech, in Othello, were to strain his throat into a preternatural scream, make a hideous wry face, or cut a caper four feet high? We might wonder at the strength of his voice, the pliancy of his features, or the springiness of his limbs; but should hardly admire him as intelligent in his art, or respectful to his audience.

But is it not agreeable to hear a *florid song* by a fine performer, though now and then the voice should be drowned amidst the accompaniments,

companiments, and though the words should not be understood by the hearers, or even by the singer? I answer, that nothing can be very agreeable, which brings disappointment. In the case supposed, the tones of the voice might no doubt give pleasure: but from instrumental music we expect something more, and from vocal music a great deal more, than mere sweetness of sound. From poetry and music united we have a right to expect pathos, sentiment, and melody, and in a word every gratification that the tuneful art can bestow. But in sweetness of tone the best singer is not superior, and scarcely equal, to an Eolus harp, to Vischer's hautboy, or to Giardini's violin. And can we without dissatisfaction see a human creature dwindle into mere wood and catgut? Can we be gratified with what only tickles the ear, when we had reason to hope, that a powerful address would have been made to the heart? — A handsome actress walking on the stage would no doubt be looked at with complacency for a minute or two, though she were not to speak a word. But surely we had a right to expect a different sort of entertainment; and were her silence to last a few minutes longer, I believe the politest audience in Europe would let her know that they were offended. — To conclude: A song, which we listen to without understanding the words, is like a picture seen at too great a distance. The former  
may

may be allowed to charm the ear with sweet sounds, in the same degree in which the latter pleases the eye with beautiful colours. But, till the design of the whole, and the meaning of each part, be made obvious to sense, it is impossible to derive any rational entertainment from either.

I hope I have given no offence to the connoisseur by these observations. They are dictated by a hearty zeal for the honour of an art, of which I have heard and seen enough to be satisfied, that it is capable of being improved into an instrument of virtue, as well as of pleasure. If I did not think so, I should hardly have taken the trouble to write these remarks, slight as they are, upon the philosophy of it. But to return :

Every thing in art, nature, or common life, must give delight, which communicates delightful passions to the human mind. And because all the passions that music can inspire are of the agreeable kind, it follows, that all pathetic or expressive music must be agreeable. Music may inspire devotion, fortitude, compassion, benevolence, tranquillity; it may infuse a gentle sorrow that softens, without wounding, the heart, or a sublime horror that expands, and elevates, while it astonishes, the imagination: but music has no expression for impiety, cowardice, cruelty, hatred, or discontent. For every essential rule of the art tends to produce pleasing combinations,

combinations of found; and it is difficult to conceive, how from these any painful or criminal affections should arise. I believe, however, it might be practicable, by means of harsh tones, irregular rhythm, and continual dissonance, to work the mind into a disagreeable state, and to produce horrible thoughts, and criminal propensity, as well as painful sensations. But this would not be music; nor can it ever be for the interest of any society to put such a villanous art in practice.

Milton was so sensible of the moral tendency of musical expression, that he ascribes to it the power of raising some praise-worthy emotions even in the devils themselves \*. Would Dryden, if he had been an adept in this art, as Milton was, have made the song of Timotheus inflame Alexander to revenge and cruelty? — At any rate, I am well pleased that Dryden fell into this mistake (if it be one), because it has produced some of the most animated lines that ever were written †. And I am also pleased to find, for the honour of music, and of this criticism, that history ascribes the burning of Persepolis, not to any of the tuneful tribe, but to the instigation of a drunken harlot.

IV. Is there not reason to think, that

\* Paradise Lost, b. 1. vers. 549. — 562.

† Alexander's Feast, stanza 6.

variety and simplicity of structure may contribute something to the agreeableness of music, as well as of poetry and prose. Variety, kept within due bounds, cannot fail to please, because it refreshes the mind with perpetual novelty; and is therefore studiously sought after in all the arts, and in none of them more than in music. To give this character to his compositions, the poet varies his phraseology and syntax; and the feet, the pauses, and the sound of contiguous verses, as much as the subject, the language, and the laws of versification will permit: and the prose-writer combines longer with shorter sentences in the same paragraph, longer with shorter clauses in the same sentence, and even longer with shorter words in the same clause; terminates contiguous clauses and sentences by a different cadence, and constructs them by a different syntax; and in general avoids all monotony and similar sounds, except where they are unavoidable, or where they may contribute (as indeed they often do) to energy or perspicuity. The musician diversifies his *melody*, by changing his keys; by deferring or interrupting his cadences; by a mixture of slower and quicker, higher and lower, softer and louder notes; and, in pieces of length, by altering the rhythm, the movement, and the air: and his *harmony* he varies, by varying his concords and discords, by a change of modulation, by contrasting the ascent or slower motion of one

part to the descent or quicker motion of another, by assigning different harmonies to the same melody, or different melodies to the same harmony, and by many other contrivances.

Simplicity makes music, as well as language, intelligible and expressive. It is in every work of art a recommendatory quality. In music it is indispensable; for we are never pleased with that music which we cannot understand, or which seems to have no meaning. Of the ancient music little more is known, than that it was very affecting and very simple. All popular and favourite airs; all that remains of the old national music in every country; all military marches, church-tunes, and other compositions that are more immediately addressed to the heart, and intended to please the general taste; all proverbial maxims of morality and prudence, and all those poetical phrases and lines, which every body remembers, and is occasionally repeating, are remarkable for simplicity. To which we may add, that language, while it improves in simplicity, grows still more and more perfect: and that, as it loses this character, it declines in the same proportion from the standard of elegance, and draws nearer and nearer to utter depravation \*. Without simplicity, the varieties of art, instead of pleasing, would only bewilder

\* See *Le Vicende della Letteratura del. Sig. Carlo Denina.*



the attention, and confound the judgement.

Rhythm, or Number, is in music a copious source of both variety and uniformity. Not to enter into any nice speculation on the nature of rhythm \*, (for which this is not a proper place), I shall only observe, that notes, as united in music, admit of the distinction of quick and slow, as well as of acute and grave; and that on the former distinction depends what is here called *Rhythm*. It is the only thing in a tune which the drum can imitate. And by that instrument, the rhythm of any tune may be imitated most perfectly, as well as by the sound of the feet in dancing:—only as the feet can hardly move so quick as the drumsticks, the dancer may be obliged to repeat his strokes at longer intervals, by supposing the music divided into larger portions; to give one stroke, for example, where the drummer might give two or three, or two where the other would give four or six. For every piece of regular music is supposed to be divided into small portions (separated in writing a by cross line called a *bar*) which, whether they contain more or fewer notes, are all equal in respect of time. In this way, the rhythm is a source of *uniformity*; which

\* The nature of Rhythm, and the several divisions of it, are very accurately explained by the learned author of *An Essay on the origin and progress of language*, vol. 2. p. 301.

pleases, by suggesting the agreeable ideas of regularity and skill, and, still more, by rendering the music intelligible. It also pleases, by raising and gratifying expectation: for if the movement of the piece were governed by no rule; if what one hears of it during the present moment were in all respects unlike and incommensurable to what one was to hear the next, and had heard the last, the whole would be a mass of confusion; and the ear would either be bewildered, having nothing to rest upon, and nothing to anticipate; or, if it should expect any stated *ratio* between the motion and the time, would be disappointed when it found that there was none.—That rhythm is a source of very great *variety*, every person must be sensible, who knows only the names of the musical notes, with such of their divisions and subdivisions as relate to time; or who has attended to the manifold varieties of quick and slow motion, which the drum is capable of producing.

As order and proportion are always delightful, it is no wonder that mankind should be agreeably affected with the rhythm of music. That they are, the universal use of dancing, and of the “spirit-stirring drum,” is a sufficient evidence. Nay, I have known a child imitate the rhythm of tunes before he could speak, and long before he could manage his voice so as to imitate their melody;—which is a proof, that human nature is susceptible

susceptible of this delight previously to the acquirement of artificial habits.

V. I hinted at the power of accidental association in giving significancy to musical compositions. It may be remarked further, that association contributes greatly to heighten their agreeable effect. We have heard them performed, some time or other, in an agreeable place perhaps, or by an agreeable person, or accompanied with words that describe agreeable ideas; or we have heard them in our early years; a period of life, which we seldom look back upon without pleasure, and of which Bacon recommends the frequent recollection as an expedient to preserve health. Nor is it necessary, that such melodies or harmonies should have much intrinsic merit, or that they should call up any distinct remembrance of the agreeable ideas associated with them. There are seasons, at which we are gratified with very moderate excellence. In childhood, every tune is delightful to a musical ear; in our advanced years, an indifferent tune will please, when set off by the amiable qualities of the performer, or by any other agreeable circumstance.—During the last war, the *Belleisle march* was long a general favourite. It filled the minds of our people with magnificent ideas of armies, and conquest, and military splendor; for they believed it to be the tune that was played by the French garrison when it marched out with the honours of war, and  
surrendered

surrendered that fortress to the British troops. — The flute of a shepherd, heard at a distance, in a fine summer day, amidst a beautiful scene of groves, hills, and waters, will give rapture to the ear of the wanderer, though the tune, the instrument, and the musician, be such as he could not endure in any other place. — If a song, or piece of music, should call up only a faint remembrance, that we were happy the last time we heard it, nothing more would be needful to make us listen to it again with peculiar satisfaction.

It is an amiable prejudice that people generally entertain in favour of their national music. This lowest degree of patriotism is not without its merit: and that man must have a hard heart, or dull imagination, in whom, though endowed with musical sensibility, no sweet emotions would arise, on hearing, in his riper years, or in a foreign land, those strains that were the delight of his childhood. What though they be inferior to the Italian? What though they be even irregular and rude? It is not their merit, which in the case supposed would interest a native, but the charming ideas they would recal to his mind: — ideas of innocence, simplicity, and leisure, of romantic enterprise, and enthusiastic attachment; and of scenes, which, on recollection, we are inclined to think, that a brighter sun illuminated, a fresher verdure crowned, and purer skies and  
happier

happier climes conspired to beautify, than are now to be seen in the dreary paths of care and disappointment, into which men, yielding to the passions peculiar to more advanced years, are tempted to wander.—There are couplets in Ogilvie's Translation of Virgil, which I could never read without emotions far more ardent than the merit of the numbers would justify. But it was that book which first taught me “the tale of Troy “divine,” and first made me acquainted with poetical sentiments; and though I read it when almost an infant, it conveyed to my heart some pleasing impressions, that remain there unimpaired to this day.

There is a dance in Switzerland, which the young shepherds perform to a tune played on a sort of bag-pipe. The tune is called *Rance des vaches*; it is wild and irregular, but has nothing in its composition that could recommend it to our notice. But the Swifs are so intoxicated with this tune, that if at any time they hear it, when abroad in foreign service, they burst into tears; and often fall sick, and even die, of a passionate desire to revisit their native country; for which reason, in some armies where they serve, the playing of this tune is prohibited\*. This tune, having been the attendant of their childhood and early youth, recalls

\* Rousseau. Dictionnaire de Musique, art. *Rance des vaches*,

to their memory those regions of wild beauty and rude magnificence, those days of liberty and peace, those nights of festivity, those happy assemblies, those tender passions, which formerly endeared to them their country, their homes, and their employments; and which, when compared with the scenes of uproar they are now engaged in, and the servitude they now undergo, awaken such regret as entirely overpowers them.

### S E C T. III.

#### *Conjectures on some peculiarities of National Music.*

There is a certain style of melody peculiar to each musical country, which the people of that country are apt to prefer to every other style. That they should prefer their own, is not surprising; and that the melody of one people should differ from that of another, is not more surprising, perhaps, than that the language of one people should differ from that of another. But there is something not unworthy of notice in the particular expression and style that characterise the music of one nation or province, and distinguish it from every other sort of music. Of this diversity Scotland supplies

a striking example. The native melody of the highlands and western isles is as different from that of the southern part of the kingdom, as the Irish or Erse language is different from the English or Scotch. In the conclusion of a discourse on music as it relates to the mind, it will not perhaps be impertinent to offer a conjecture on the cause of these peculiarities; which, though it should not (and indeed I am satisfied that it will not) fully account for any one of them, may however incline the reader to think that they are not unaccountable, and may also throw some faint light on this part of philosophy.

Every thought that partakes of the nature of passion, has a correspondent expression in the look and gesture: and so strict is the union between the passion and its outward sign, that, where the former is not in some degree felt, the latter can never be perfectly natural, but, if assumed, becomes awkward mimicry, instead of that genuine imitation of nature, which draws forth the sympathy of the beholder. If, therefore, there be, in the circumstances of particular nations or persons, any thing that gives a peculiarity to their passions and thoughts, it seems reasonable to expect, that they will also have something peculiar in the expression of their countenance, and even in the form of their features. Caius Marius, Jugurtha, Tamerlane, and some other great warriors, are celebrated for a peculiar ferocity of aspect, which they had

no doubt contracted from a perpetual and unrestrained exertion of fortitude, contempt, and other violent emotions. These produced in the face their correspondent expressions, which being often repeated, became at last as habitual to the features, as the sentiments they arose from were to the heart. Savages, whose thoughts are little inured to controul, have more of this significancy of look, than those men, who, being born and bred in civilized nations, are accustomed from their childhood to suppress every emotion that tends to interrupt the peace of society. And while the bloom of youth lasts, and the smoothness of feature peculiar to that period, the human face is less marked with any strong character, than in old age:—a peevish or surly stripling may elude the eye of the physiognomist; but a wicked old man, whose visage does not betray the evil temperature of his heart, must have more cunning than it would be prudent for him to acknowledge. Even by the trade or profession the human countenance may be characterised. They who employ themselves in the nicer mechanic arts, that require the earnest attention of the artist, do generally contract a fixedness of feature suited to that one uniform sentiment which engrosses them while at work. Whereas, other artists, whose work requires less attention, and who may ply their trade and amuse themselves with conversation at the same time, have for the most

part



part smother and more unmeaning faces : their thoughts are more miscellaneous, and therefore their features are less fixed in one uniform configuration. A keen penetrating look indicates thoughtfulness and spirit : a dull torpid countenance is not often accompanied with great sagacity.

This, though there may be many an exception, is in general true of the visible signs of our passions ; and it is no less true of the audible. A man habitually peevish, or passionate, or querulous, or imperious, may be known by the sound of his voice, as well as by his physiognomy. May we not go a step farther, and say, that if a man under the influence of any passion were to compose a discourse, or a poem, or a tune, his work would in some measure exhibit an image of his mind ? I could not easily be persuaded, that Swift and Juvenal were men of sweet tempers ; or that Thomson, Arbuthnot, and Prior were ill-natured. The airs of Felton are so uniformly mournful, that I cannot suppose him to have been a merry, or even a cheerful man. If a musician, in deep affliction, were to attempt to compose a lively air, I believe he would not succeed : though I confess I do not well understand the nature of the connection that may take place between a mournful mind and a melancholy tune. It is easy to conceive, how a poet or an orator should transfuse his passions into his work : for every passion suggests ideas

congenial to its own nature; and the composition of the poet, or of the orator, must necessarily consist of those ideas that occur at the time he is composing. But musical sounds are not the signs of ideas; rarely are they even the imitations of natural sounds: so that I am at a loss to conceive how it should happen, that a musician, overwhelmed with sorrow, for example, should put together a series of notes, whose expression is contrary to that of another series which he had put together when elevated with joy. But of the fact I am not doubtful; though I have not sagacity, or knowledge of music, enough to be able to explain it. And my opinion in this matter is warranted by that of a more competent judge; who says, speaking of church-voluntaries, that if the Organist  
 “ do not feel in himself the divine energy of  
 “ devotion, he will labour in vain to raise it  
 “ in others. Nor can he hope to throw  
 “ out those happy instantaneous thoughts,  
 “ which sometimes far exceed the best con-  
 “ certed compositions, and which the en-  
 “ raptured performer would gladly secure  
 “ to his future use and pleasure, did they  
 “ not as fleetly escape as they arise\*.” A man who has made music the study of his life, and is well acquainted with all the best examples of style and expression that are to be found in the works of former masters,

\* Avifon on Musical Expression, pag. 88. 89.

may, by memory and much practice, attain a sort of mechanical dexterity in contriving music suitable to any given passion; but such music would, I presume, be vulgar and spiritless, compared to what an artist of genius throws out, when under the power of any ardent emotion. It is recorded of Lulli, that, once when his imagination was all on fire with some verses descriptive of terrible ideas, which he had been reading in a French tragedy, he ran to his harpsichord, and struck off such a combination of sounds, that the company felt their hair stand on end with horror.

Let us therefore suppose it proved, or, if you please, take it for granted, that different sentiments in the mind of the musician will give different and peculiar expressions to his music; — and upon this principle, it will not perhaps be impossible to account for some of the phenomena of a national ear.

The highlands of Scotland are a picturesque, but in general a melancholy country. Long tracts of mountainous desert, covered with dark heath, and often obscured by misty weather; narrow vallies, thinly inhabited, and bounded by precipices resounding with the fall of torrents; a soil so rugged, and a climate so dreary, as in many parts to admit neither the amusements of pasturage, nor the labours of agriculture; the mournful dashing of waves along the friths and lakes that intersect the country; the portentous

tentous noises which every change of the wind, and every increase and diminution of the waters, is apt to raise, in a lonely region, full of echoes, and rocks, and caverns; the grotesque and ghastly appearance of such a landscape by the light of the moon: — objects like these diffuse a gloom over the fancy, which may be compatible enough with occasional and social merriment, but cannot fail to tincture the thoughts of a native in the hour of silence and solitude. If these people, notwithstanding their reformation in religion, and more frequent intercourse with strangers, do still retain many of their old superstitions, we need not doubt but in former times they must have been much more enslaved to the horrors of imagination, when beset with the bugbears of Popery, and the darkness of Paganism. Most of their superstitions are of a melancholy cast. That *Second Sight*, wherewith some of them are still supposed to be haunted, is considered by themselves as a misfortune, on account of the many dreadful images it is said to obtrude upon the fancy. I have been told, that the inhabitants of some of the Alpine regions do likewise lay claim to a sort of second sight. Nor is it wonderful, that persons of lively imagination, immured in deep solitude, and surrounded with the stupendous scenery of clouds, precipices, and torrents, should dream, even when they think themselves awake, of those few striking ideas

ideas with which their lonely lives are diversified ; of corpses, funeral processions, and other objects of terror ; or of marriages, and the arrival of strangers, and such like matters of more agreeable curiosity \*. Let it be observed

\* I do not find sufficient evidence for the reality of *second sight*, or at least of what is commonly understood by that term. A treatise on the subject was published in the year 1762, in which many tales were told of persons, whom the author believed to have been favoured, or haunted, with these illuminations ; but most of the tales were trifling and ridiculous : and the whole work betrayed on the part of the compiler such extreme credulity, as could not fail to prejudice many readers against his system. — That any of these visionaries are liable to be swayed in their declarations by sinister views, I will not say ; though a gentleman of character assured me, that one of them offered to sell him this unaccountable talent for half a crown. But this I think may be said with confidence, that none but ignorant people pretend to be gifted in this way. And in them it may be nothing more, perhaps, than short fits of sudden sleep or drowsiness attended with lively dreams, and arising from some bodily disorder, the effect of idleness, low spirits, or a gloomy imagination. For it is admitted, even by the most credulous highlanders, that, as knowledge and industry are propagated in their country, the second sight disappears in proportion : and nobody ever laid claim to this faculty, who was much employed in the intercourse of social life. Nor is it at all extraordinary, that one should have the appearance of being awake, and should even think one's self so, during these fits of dozing ; or that they should come on suddenly, and while one is engaged in some business. The same thing happens to persons much fatigued, or long kept awake, who frequently fall asleep for a moment, or for a longer space, while they are standing, or walking, or riding on horseback. Add but a lively dream to this  
slumber,

observed also, that the ancient highlanders of Scotland had hardly any other way of supporting

slumber, and (which is the frequent effect of disease) take a way the consciousness of having been asleep; and a superstitious man, who is always hearing and believing tales of second sight, may easily mistake his dream for a waking vision: which however is soon forgotten when no subsequent occurrence recalls it to his memory; but which, if it shall be thought to resemble any future event, exalts the poor dreamer into a highland prophet. This conceit makes him more reclusive and more melancholy than ever, and so feeds his disease, and multiplies his visions; which, if they are not dissipated by business or society, may continue to haunt him as long as he lives; and which, in their progress through the neighbourhood, receive some new tincture of the marvellous from every mouth that promotes their circulation. — As to the prophetic nature of this second-sight, it cannot be admitted at all. That the Deity should work a miracle, in order to give intimation of the frivolous things that these tales are made up of, the arrival of a stranger, the nailing of a coffin, or the colour of a suit of cloaths; and that these intimations should be given for no end, and to those persons only who are idle and solitary, who speak Erse, or who live among mountains and deserts, — is like nothing in nature or providence that we are acquainted with; and must therefore, unless it were confirmed by satisfactory proof, (which is not the case), be rejected as absurd and incredible. The visions, such as they are, may reasonably enough be ascribed to a distempered fancy. And that in them, as well as in our ordinary dreams, certain appearances should, on some rare occasions, resemble certain events, is to be expected from the laws of chance; and seems to have in it nothing more marvellous or supernatural, than that the parrot, who deals out his scurrilities at random, should sometimes happen to salute the passenger by his right appellation.

supporting themselves, than by hunting, fishing, or war, professions that are continually exposed to fatal accidents. And hence, no doubt, additional horrors would often haunt their solitude, and a deeper gloom overshadow the imagination even of the hardiest native.

But, whatever the reader may think of these remarks, or of their pertinency to the present subject, I am sure I shall not be blamed for quoting, from a poem little known, the following very picturesque lines; which may show, that what in history or philosophy would make but an awkward figure, may sometimes have a charming effect in poetry.

E'er since of old the haughty Thanes of Rofs  
 (So to the simple swain tradition tells)  
 Were wont, with clans and ready vassals throng'd,  
 To wake the bounding stag, or guilty wolf;  
 There oft is heard at midnight, or at noon,  
 Beginning faint, but rising still more loud  
 And nearer, voice of hunters and of hounds,  
 And horns, hoarse-winded, blowing far and keen.  
 Forthwith the hubbub multiplies; the gale  
 Labours with wilder shrieks, and ruder din  
 Of hot pursuit; the broken cry of deer  
 Mangled by throttling dogs; the shouts of men,  
 And hoofs thick-beating on the hollow hill.  
 Sudden, the grazing heifer in the vale  
 Starts at the tumult, and the herdsman's ears  
 Tingle with inward dread. Aghast he eyes  
 The mountain's height, and all the ridges round;  
 Yet not one trace of living wight discerns:  
 Nor knows, o'eraw'd and trembling as he stands,  
 To what, or whom, he owes his idle fear,  
 To ghost, to witch, to fairy, or to fiend;  
 But wonders; and no end of wondering finds.

ALBANIA, a poem. London, 1737, folio.

What then would it be reasonable to expect from the fanciful tribe, from the musicians and poets, of such a region? Strains, expressive of joy, tranquillity, or the softer passions? No: their style must have been better suited to their circumstances. And so we find in fact that their music is. The wildest irregularity appears in its composition: the expression is warlike, and melancholy, and approaches even to the terrible. — And that their poetry is almost uniformly mournful, and their views of nature dark and dreary, will be allowed, by all who admit the authenticity of Ossian; and not doubted by any who believe those fragments of highland poetry to be genuine, which many old people, now alive, of that country, remember to have heard in their youth, and were then taught to refer to a pretty high antiquity.

Some of the southern provinces of Scotland present a very different prospect. Smooth and lofty hills covered with verdure; clear streams winding through long and beautiful vallies; trees produced without culture, here straggling or single, and there crouding into little groves and bowers; — with other circumstances peculiar to the districts I allude to, render them fit for pasturage, and favourable to romantic leisure and tender passions. Several of the old Scotch songs take their names from the rivulets, villages, and hills, adjoining to the Tweed near Melrose



rose \*; a region distinguished by many charming varieties of rural scenery, and which, whether we consider the face of the country, or the genius of the people, may properly enough be termed the Arcadia of Scotland. And all these songs are sweetly and powerfully expressive of love and tenderness, and other emotions suited to the tranquillity of pastoral life.

It is a common opinion, that these songs were composed by David Rizzio, a musician from Italy, the unfortunate favourite of a very unfortunate queen. But this must be a mistake. The style of the Scotch music was fixed before his time; for many of the best of these tunes are ascribed by tradition to a more remote period. And it is not to be supposed, that he, a foreigner, and in the latter part of his life a man of business, could have acquired or invented a style of musical composition so different in every respect from that to which he had been accustomed in his own country. *Melody* is so much the characteristic of the Scotch tunes, that I doubt whether even basses were set to them before the present century; whereas, in the days of Rizzio, *Harmony* was the fashionable study of the Italian composers. Palestina himself, who

\* Cowdenknows, Galashiels, Galawater, Etterick banks, Braes of Yarrow, Bush above Traquair, &c.

flourished about two hundred and fifty years ago, and who has obtained the high title of Father of Harmony, is by a great master \* ranked with those who neglected air, and were too closely attached to counterpoint; and at the time when Rizzio was a student in the art, Palestrina's must have been the favourite music in Italy. — Besides, though the style of the old Scotch melody has been well imitated by Mr. Oswald, and some other natives, I do not find that any foreigner has ever caught the true spirit of it. Gemiani, a great and original genius in this art, and a professed admirer of the Scotch songs, (some of which he published with accompaniments), used to say, that he had blotted many a quire of paper to no purpose, in attempting to compose a second strain to that fine little air which in Scotland is known by the name of *The broom of Corwenknows*. — To all which we may add, that Taffoni, the author of *La Secchia rapita*, speaks of this music as well esteemed by the Italians of his time, and ascribes the invention of it to James King of Scotland: — which a foreigner might naturally do, as all the Scotch kings of that name, particularly the first, third, fourth, and fifth, were skilled both in music and poetry.

But though I admit Taffoni's testimony as a proof, that the Scotch music is more

\* Avifon on Mus. Expression, p. 49. 51.

ancient than Rizzio, I do not think him right in what he says of its inventor. Nor can I acquiesce in the opinion of those who give the honour of this invention to the monks of Melrose. I rather believe, that it took its rise among men who were real shepherds, and who actually felt the sentiments and affections, whereof it is so very expressive. Rizzio may have been one of the first, perhaps, who made a collection of these songs; or he may have played them with more delicate touches than the Scotch musicians of that time; or perhaps corrected the extravagance of certain passages;—for one is struck with the regularity of some, as well as amused with the wildness of others:—and in all or any of those cases, it might be said with truth, that the Scotch music is under obligations to him:—but that this style of pastoral melody, so unlike the Italian, and in every respect so peculiar, should have been established or invented by him, is incredible; nay, (if it were worth while to assert any thing so positively on such a subject), we might even say impossible.

The acknowledged and unequalled excellence of the Italian music, is one of those phenomena of a National Taste, that may in part be accounted for. Let us recollect some particulars of the history of that period, when this music began to recommend itself to general notice.

Leo the Tenth, and some of his immediate

diate predecessors, had many great vices, and some virtues; and we at this day feel the good effects of both: for Providence has been pleased, in this instance, as in many others, to bring good out of evil, and to accomplish the most glorious purposes by means that seemed to have an opposite tendency. The profusion, and other more scandalous qualities of Leo, were instrumental in hastening forward the Reformation: to his liberality and love of art we owe the finest pictures, the finest musical compositions, and some of the finest poems in the world.

The sixteenth century does indeed great honour to Italian genius. The ambition of Alexander the Sixth, and Julius the Second, had raised the Papal power to higher eminence, and settled it on a firmer foundation, than had been known before their time. Leo, therefore, had leisure to indulge his love of luxury and of art; and the Italians, under his administration, to cultivate the arts and sciences, which many other favourable events conspired to promote. Printing had been lately found out: the taking of Constantinople by the Turks had made a dispersion of the learned, many of whom took refuge in Italy: Leo found, in the treasures accumulated by Julius the Second, and in the ample revenues of the pontificate, the means both of generosity and of debauchery: and when the Pope, and the houses of Medici and Montefeltro, had set the  
example,

example, it became the fashion all over Italy, to patronise genius, and encourage learning. The first efforts of a literary spirit appeared in translating the Greek authors into Latin; a tongue which every scholar was ambitious to acquire, and in which many elegant compositions, both verse and prose, were produced about this time in Italy. Fracastorius, Sanazarius, Vida, distinguished themselves in Latin poetry; Bembo, Casa, Manutius, Sigonius, in Latin prose. But genius seldom displays itself to advantage in a foreign tongue. The cultivation of the Toscan language, since the time of Petrarcha, who flourished one hundred and fifty years before the period we speak of, had been too much neglected; but was now resumed with the most desirable success; particularly by Tasso and Ariosto, who carried the Italian poetry to its highest perfection.

The other fine arts were no less fortunate in the hands of Raphael and Palestina. What Homer was in poetry, these authors were in painting and music. Their works are still regarded as standards of good taste, and models for imitation; and though improvement may no doubt have been made since their time, in some inferior branches of their respective arts, particularly in what regards delicacy of manner; it may with reason be doubted, whether in grandeur of design, and strength of invention, they have as yet been excelled or equalled. Greece owed much of her

her literary glory to the merit of her ancient authors. They at once fixed the fashion in the several kinds of writing; and they happened to fix it on the immoveable basis of simplicity and nature. Had not the Italian music in its infant state fallen into the hands of a great genius like Palestina, it would not have arrived at maturity so soon. A long succession of inferior composers might have made discoveries in the art, but could not have raised it above mediocrity: and such people are not of influence enough to render a new art respectable in the eyes, either of the learned, or of the vulgar. But Palestina made his art an object of admiration, not only to his own country, but to a great part of Europe. In England he was studied and imitated by Tallis, in the reign of Henry the Eighth. All good judges were satisfied, that this system of harmony was founded on right principles; and that, though it might perhaps be improved, nothing in the art could be a real improvement, which was contradictory to it.

In the age of Leo, a genius like Palestina must have been distinguished, even though the art he professed had gratified no important principle of the human mind; but as his art gratified the religious principle, he could not fail, in those days, and among Italians, to meet with the highest encouragement. In fact, music since that time has been cultivated in Italy with the utmost attention

tention and success. Scarlatti, Corelli, Geminiani, Martini, Marcello, were all men of extraordinary abilities; and any one of them, in the circumstances of Palestina, might perhaps have been as eminent as he. Need we wonder, then, at the unequalled excellence of the Italian music?

But other causes have contributed to this effect. Nobody who understands the language of modern Italy, will deny, that the natives have a peculiar delicacy of perception in regard to vocal sound. This delicacy appears in the sweetness of their verse, in the cadence of their prose, and even in the formation and inflexion of their words. Whether it be owing to the climate, or to the influence of the other arts; whether it be derived from their Gothic ancestors, or from their more remote forefathers of ancient Rome; whether it be the effect of weakness or of soundness in the vocal and auditory organs of the people, this national niceness of ear must be considered as one cause of the melody both of their speech and of their music. They are mistaken who think the Italian an effeminate language. Soft it is indeed, and of easy modulation, but susceptible withal of the utmost dignity of sound, as well as of elegant arrangement and nervous phraseology. In history and oratory, it may boast of many excellent models: and its poetry is far superior to that of every other modern nation, except the English.

And if it be true, that all music is originally song, the most poetical nation would seem to have the fairest chance to become the most musical. The Italian tongue, in strength and variety of harmony, is not superior, and perhaps not equal, to the English; but, abounding more in vowels and liquid sounds, and being therefore more easily articulated, is fitter for the purposes of music: and it deserves our notice, that poetical numbers were brought to perfection in Italy two hundred years sooner than in any other country of modern Europe.

## C H A P. VII.

### Of Sympathy.

**A**S a great part of the pleasure we derive from poetry depends on our Sympathetic Feelings, the philosophy of Sympathy ought always to form a part of the science of Criticism. On this subject, therefore, I beg leave to subjoin a few brief remarks, that may possibly throw light on some of the foregoing, as well as subsequent reasonings.

When we consider the condition of another person, especially if it seem to be pleasurable or painful, we are apt to fancy ourselves



ourselves in the same condition, and to feel in some degree the pain or pleasure that we think we should feel if we were really in that condition. Hence the good of others becomes in some measure our good, and their evil our evil; the obvious effect of which is, to bind men more closely together in society, and prompt them to promote the good, and relieve the distresses, of one another. Sympathy with distress is called Compassion or Pity: Sympathy with happiness has no particular name; but, when expressed in words to the happy person, is termed Congratulation.

We sympathise, in some degree, even with things inanimate. To lose a staff we have long worn, to see in ruins a house in which we have long lived, may affect us with a momentary concern, though in point of value the loss be nothing. With the dead we sympathise, and even with those circumstances of their condition whereof we know that they are utterly insensible; such as, their being shut up in a cold and solitary grave, excluded from the light of the sun, and from all the pleasures of life, and liable in a few years to be forgotten for ever.

— Towards the brute creation our sympathy is, and ought to be, strong, they being percipient creatures like ourselves. A merciful man is merciful to his beast; and that person would be deemed melancholy or hard-hearted, who should see the frisking

lamb, or hear the chearful song of the lark, or observe the transport of the dog when he finds the master he had lost, without any participation of their joy. There are few passages of descriptive poetry into which we enter with a more hearty fellow-feeling, than where Virgil and Lucretius paint so admirably, the one the sorrow of a steer for the loss of his fellow, the other the affliction of a cow deprived of her calf\*.——But our sympathy exerts itself most powerfully towards our fellow-men: and, other circumstances being equal, is stronger or weaker, according as they are more or less nearly connected with us, and their condition more or less similar to our own.

We often sympathise with one another, when the person principally concerned has little sense of either good or evil. We blush for another's ill-breeding, even when we know that he himself is not aware of it. We pity a madman, though we believe him to be happy in his phrensy. We tremble for a mason standing on a high scaffold, though we know that custom has made it quite familiar to him. It gives us pain to see another on the brink of a precipice, tho' we be secure ourselves, and have no doubt of his circumspection. In these cases, it would seem, that our sympathy is raised,

\* Virgil, Georg. iii. vers. 519.; Lucretius, ii. vers. 355.

not so much by our reflecting on what others really feel, as by a lively conception of what they would feel if their nature were exactly such as ours; or of what we ourselves should feel, if we were in their condition, with the same sentiments we have at present\*.

Many of our passions may be communicated and strengthened by sympathy. If we go into a chearful company, we become chearful; if into a mournful one, we become sad. The presence of a great multitude engaged in devotion, tends to make us devout. Cowards have behaved valiantly, when all their companions were valiant; and the timidity of a few has struck a panic into a whole army. — We are not, however, much inclined to sympathise with violent anger, jealousy, envy, malevolence, and other sanguinary or unnatural passions: we rather take part against them, and sympathise with those persons who are in danger from them; because we can more easily enter into their distress, and suppose ourselves in their condition. But indignation at vice, particularly at ingratitude, cruelty, treachery, and the like, when we are well acquainted with the case, awakens in us a most intense fellow-feeling: and the satisfaction we are conscious of, when such crimes are ade-

\* See Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, sect 1.

quately punished, though somewhat stern and gloomy, is however sincere, and by no means dishonourable or detrimental to our moral nature; nor at all inconsistent with that pity, which the sufferings of the criminal extort from us, when we are made to conceive them in a lively manner.

Of sympathy all men are not equally susceptible. They who have a lively imagination, keen feelings, and what we call a tender heart, are most subject to it. Habits of attention, the study of the works of nature, and of the best performances in art, experience of adversity, the love of virtue and of mankind, tend greatly to cherish it; and those passions whereof self is the object, as pride, self-conceit, the love of money, sensuality, envy, vanity, have a tendency no less powerful to destroy it. Nothing renders a man more amiable, or more useful, than a disposition to rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with those that weep; to enter heartily, not officiously, into the concerns of his fellow-creatures; to comply with the innocent humour of his company, more attentive to them than to himself, and to avoid every occasion of giving pain or offence. And nothing but downright immorality is more disagreeable, than that person is, who affects bluntness of manner, and would be thought at all times to speak all that he thinks, whether people take it well or ill; or than those pedants are, of what-  
ever

ever profession; (for we have them of all professions), who, without minding others, or entering into their views of things, are continually obtruding themselves upon the conversation, and their own concerns, and the sentiments and language peculiar to their own trades and fraternities. This behaviour, though under the name of plain-dealing it may arrogate a superiority to artificial rules, is generally the effect of pride, ignorance, or stupidity, or rather of all the three in conjunction. A modest man, who sympathetically attends to the condition and sentiments of others, will of his own accord make those allowances in their favour, which he wishes to be made in his own; and will think it as much his duty to promote their happiness, as he thinks it theirs to promote his. And such a man is well principled in equity, as well as in good-breeding: and though, from an imperfect knowledge of forms, or from his having had but few opportunities to put them in practice, his manner may not be so graceful, or so easy, as could be wished, he will never give offence to any person of penetration and good-nature.

With feelings which we do not approve, or not have experienced, we are not apt to sympathise. The distress of the miser when his hoard is stolen, of the fop when he soils his fine jubilee cloaths, of the vaunting coxcomb when his lies are detected, of the unnatural parent when his daughter escapes  
with

with a deserving lover, is more likely to move laughter than compassion. At Sparta, every father had the privilege of correcting any child; he who had experience of paternal tenderness being supposed incapable of wounding a parent's sensibility by unjust or rigorous chastisement. When the Cardinal of Milan would expostulate with the Lady Constance upon her violent sorrow for the loss of her child, she answers, but without deigning to address her answer to one who she knew could be no competent judge of her case, "He speaks to me who  
" never had a son \*." — The Greeks and Romans were as eminent for public spirit, and for parental affection, as we; but, for a reason elsewhere assigned †, knew little of that romantic love between unmarried persons, which modern manners and novels have a tendency to inspire. Accordingly the distress in their tragedies often arose from patriotism, and from the conjugal and filial charities, but not from the romantic passion whereof we now speak. But there are few English tragedies, and still fewer French, wherein some love-affair is not connected with the plot. This always raises our sympathy; but would not have been so interesting to the Greeks or Romans, because they

\* King John, act 3. scene 3.

† Essay on Laughter, chap. 4.

were not much acquainted with the refinements of this passion.

Sympathy, as the means of conveying certain feelings from one breast to another, might be made a powerful instrument of moral discipline, if poets, and other writers of fable, were careful to call forth our sensibility towards those emotions only that favour virtue, and invigorate the human mind. Fictions, that breathe the spirit of patriotism or valour; that make us sympathise with the parental, conjugal, or filial charities; that recommend misfortune to our pity, or expose crimes to our abhorrence, may certainly be useful in a moral view, by cherishing passions, that, while they improve the heart, can hardly be indulged to excess. But those dreadful tales, that only give anguish to the reader, can never do any good: they fatigue, enervate, and overwhelm the soul: and when the calamities they describe are made to fall upon the innocent, our moral principles are in some danger of a temporary depravation from the perusal, whatever resemblance the fable may be supposed to bear to the events of real life. Some late authors of fiction seem to have thought it incumbent upon them, not only to touch the heart, but to tear it in pieces. They heap "misfortune on misfortune, grief on grief," without end, and without mercy: which discomposes the reader too much to give him either pleasure or improve-

ment ; and is contrary to the practice of the wiser ancients, whose most pathetic scenes were generally short.

It is said, that at the first representation of *the Furies* of Eschylus, the horror of the spectacle was so great, that several women miscarried ; which was indeed pathos with a vengeance. But though the truth of that story should be questioned, it admits of no doubt, that objects of grief and horror too much enlarged on by the poet or novelist may do more harm than good, and give more pain than pleasure, to the mind of the reader. Surely this must be contrary to the essential rules of art, whether we consider poetry as intended to please that it may instruct, or to instruct that it may the more effectually please. And supposing the real evils of life to be as various and important as is commonly believed, we must be thought to consult our own interest very absurdly, if we seek to torment ourselves with imaginary misfortune. Horace insinuates, that the ancient *Satyric Drama* (a sort of burlesque tragi-comedy) was contrived for the entertainment of the more disorderly part of the audience\* ; and our critics assure us, that the modern farce is addressed to the upper gallery, where, it is supposed, there is no great relish for the sublime graces of the Tragic Muse. Yet I be-

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 221.



lieve these *little pieces*, if consistent with decency, will be found neither unpleasant nor unprofitable even to the most learned spectator. A man, especially if advanced in years, would not chuse to go home with that gloom upon his mind which an affecting tragedy is intended to diffuse: and if the play has conveyed any sound instruction, there is no risk of its being dissipated by a little innocent mirth.

Upon the same principle, I confess, that I am not offended with those comic scenes wherewith our great Dramatic Poet has occasionally thought proper to diversify his tragedies. Such a licence will at least be allowed to be more pardonable in him, than it would be in other Tragic poets. They must make their way to the heart, as an army does to a strong fortification, by slow and regular approaches; because they cannot, like Shakespeare, take it at once, and by storm. In their pieces, therefore, a mixture of comedy might have as bad an effect; as if besiegers were to retire from the out-works they had gained, and leave the enemy at leisure to fortify them a second time. But Shakespeare penetrates the heart by a single effort, and can make us as sad in the present scene, as if we had not been merry in the former. With such powers as he possessed in the pathetic, if he had made his tragedies uniformly mournful or terrible from beginning to end, no person of sensibility

would have been able to support the representation. — As to the probability of these mixed compositions, it admits of no doubt. Nature every where presents a similar mixture of tragedy and comedy, of joy and sorrow, of laughter and solemnity, in the common affairs of life. The servants of a court know little of what passes among princes and statesmen, and may therefore, like the porter in Macbeth, be very jocular when their superiors are in deep distress. The death of a favourite child is a great affliction to parents and friends; but the man who digs the grave may, like Goodman Delver in Hamlet, be very chearful while he is going about his work. A conspiracy may be dangerous; but the constable who apprehends the traitors may, like Dogberry, be a ludicrous character, and his very absurdities may be instrumental in bringing the plot to light, as well as in delaying or hastening forward the discovery. — I grant, that compositions, like those I would now apologize for, cannot properly be called either tragedies or comedies: but the name is of no consequence; let them be called *Plays*: and if in them nature is imitated in such a way as to give pleasure and instruction, they are as well entitled to the denomination of *Dramatic Poems*, as any thing in Sophocles, Racine, or Voltaire. — But to return:

Love is another “tyrant of the throbbing  
“breast,”

“breast,” of whom they who wish to see the stage transformed into a school of virtue, complain, that his influence in the modern drama is too despotical. Love, kept within due bounds, is no doubt, as the song says, “a gentle and a generous passion ;” but no other passion has so strong a tendency to transgress the due bounds : and the frequent contemplation of its various ardours and agonies, as exhibited in plays and novels, can scarce fail to enervate the mind, and to raise emotions and sympathies unfriendly to innocence. And certain it is, that fables in which there is neither love nor gallantry, may be made highly interesting even to the fancy and affections of a modern reader. This appears, not only from the writings of Shakespeare, and other great authors, but from the *Pilgrim’s Progress* of Bunyan, and the history of Robinson Crusoe : than which last, there is not perhaps in any language a more interesting narrative ; or a tale better contrived for communicating to the reader a lively idea of the importance of the mechanic arts, of the sweets of social life, and of the dignity of independence.

P A R T. II.

OF THE LANGUAGE OF POETRY.

**H**AVING finished what I intended to say on the general nature of Poetry, as an Imitative Art, I proceed to consider the INSTRUMENT which it employs in its imitations; or, in other words, to explain the General Nature of POETIC LANGUAGE. For *language* is the poet's instrument of imitation, as *sound* is the musician's, and *colour* the painter's. My conclusions on this part of the subject will be found to terminate in the principles already laid down.

Words in Poetry are chosen, first, for their *sense*; and, secondly, for their *sound*. That the first of these grounds of choice is the more excellent, nobody can deny. He who in literary matters prefers sound to sense, is a fool. Yet sound is to be attended to, even in prose; and in verse demands particular attention.

attention. I shall consider Poetical Language, first, as SIGNIFICANT; and, secondly, as SUSCEPTIBLE OF HARMONY.

## C H A P. I.

Of Poetical Language, considered as significant.

**I**F, as I have endeavoured to prove, Poetry be imitative of Nature, poetical fictions of real events, poetical images of real appearances in the visible creation, and poetical personages of real human characters; it would seem to follow, that the *language of Poetry* must be an imitation of the *language of Nature*. For nothing but what is supposed to be natural can please; and language, as well as fable, imagery, and moral description, may displease, by being unnatural. — What then is meant by *Natural Language*? This comes to be our first inquiry.

S E C T.

## S E C T. I.

*An idea of Natural Language.*

THE term *Natural Language* has sometimes been used by philosophers to denote those tones of the human voice, attitudes of the body, and configurations of the features, which, being *naturally* expressive of certain emotions of the soul, are universal among mankind, and every where understood. Thus anger, fear, pity, adoration, joy, contempt, and almost every other passion, has a look, attitude, and tone of voice, peculiar to itself; which would seem to be the effect, not of men imitating one another, but of the soul operating upon the body; and which, when well expressed in a picture or statue, or when it appears in human behaviour, is understood by all mankind, as the external sign of that passion which it is for the most part observed to accompany. In this acceptation, *natural language* is contradistinguished to those articulate voices to which the name of *speech* has been appropriated; and which are also universal among mankind, though different in different nations; but derive all their meaning from human compact and *artifice*, and are not understood except by those

those who have been instructed in the use of them. — But in this inquiry the term *Natural Language* denotes that use of speech, or of *artificial language*, which is suitable to the speaker and to the occasion. “Proper words in proper places,” is Swift’s definition of a good style; and may with equal propriety, serve for a definition of that style, or mode of language, which is here called *Natural*, in contradistinction, not to *artificial* (itself being artificial) but to *unnatural*; and which it is the poet’s business to imitate. I say, *to imitate*: for as poets (for a reason already given) copy nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection, wherein, consistently with verisimilitude, and with the genius of their work, it may be supposed to be; and are therefore said to *imitate* nature, that is, to give a view of nature similar to, but somewhat different from the reality:—so, in forming poetical language, they must take for their model human speech, not in that imperfect state wherein it is used on the common occasions of life, but in that state of perfection, whereof, consistently with verisimilitude, it may be supposed to be susceptible.

But, as we cannot estimate the perfection or imperfection of poetical imagery, till we know the natural appearance of the thing described; so neither can we judge of this perfection of human speech, till we have formed some idea of that quality of language which we express by the epithet *natural*.

That some modes of language are more natural than others, and that one mode may be natural at one time which at another would be unnatural, must be evident even to those who never studied criticism. Would soft words, for example, be natural in the mouth of a very angry man? or do even the vulgar expect blustering expressions from him who melts with pity, or love, or sorrow? Between groans and pain, tears and grief, laughter and jocularities, trembling and fear, the connection is not more natural, than between certain sentiments of the human mind and certain modifications of human language.

*Natural* language and *good* language are not the same: and Swift's definition, which is equally applicable to both, will not perhaps be found to express adequately the characteristic of either. The qualities of good language are perspicuity, simplicity, elegance, energy, and harmony. But language may possess all these qualities, and yet not be natural. Would the Anacreontic or Ovidian simplicity be natural in the mouth of Achilles upbraiding Agamemnon with his tyranny and injustice; or of Lear defying the tempestuous elements, and imprecating perdition upon his daughters? Would that perspicuity which we justly admire in Cato's soliloquy \*, be accounted natural in Ham-

\* It must be so. Plato, thou reason'st well, &c.



let's \*, by those who know, that the former is supposed to speak with the rationality of a philosopher, and the latter with the agitation of a young man tortured to madness with sorrow, and love, disappointment, and revenge? Would language so magnificent as that in which the sublime Othello speaks of the pomps and honours of war, be natural in the mouth of the soft, the humble, the broken-hearted Desdemona bewailing her unhappy fate? Or would the sonorous harmony of the Dithyrambic song, or Epic poem, suit the simplicity of shepherds, contending in alternate verse, and praising their mistresses, putting forth riddles, or making remarks upon the weather? — Yet language must always be so far simple as to have no superfluous decoration; so far perspicuous, as to let us see clearly what is meant; and so far elegant, as to give no ground to suspect the author of ignorance, or want of taste.

Good language is determinate and absolute. We know it where-ever we meet with it; we may learn to speak and write it from books alone. Whether pronounced by a clown or a hero, a wise man or an idiot, language is still good if it be according to rule. But natural language is something not absolute but relative; and can be estimated by those only, who have studied men as well

\* To be, or not to be, &c.

as books; and who attend to the real or supposed character of the speaker, as well as to the import of what is spoken.

There are several particulars relating to the speaker which we must attend to, before we can judge whether his expression be natural. — It is obvious, that his *temper* must be taken into the account. From the fiery and passionate we expect one sort of language, from the calm and moderate another. That impetuosity which is natural in Achilles, would in Sarpedon or Ulysses be quite the contrary; as the mellifluent copiousness of Nestor would ill become the blunt rusticity of Ajax. Those diversities of temper, which make men think differently on the same occasion, will also make them speak the same thoughts in a different manner. And as the temper of the same man is not always uniform, but is variously affected by youth and old age, and by the prevalence of temporary passions; so neither will that style which is most natural to him be always uniform, but may be energetic or languid, abrupt or equable, figurative or plain, according to the passions or sentiments that may happen to predominate in his mind. And hence, to judge whether his language be natural, we must attend, not only to the habitual temper, but also to the *present passions*, and even to the *age* of the speaker. — Nor should we overlook his *intellectual peculiarities*. If his thoughts be confused or indistinct, his style must

must be immethodical and obscure; if the former be much diversified, the latter will be equally copious.—The *external circumstances* of the speaker, his rank and fortune, his education and company, particularly the two last, have no little influence in characterising his style. A clown and a man of learning, a pedantic and a polite scholar, a husbandman and a soldier, a mechanic and a seaman, reciting the same narrative, will, each of them, adopt a peculiar mode of expression, suitable to the ideas that occupy his mind, and to the language he has been accustomed to speak and hear: and if a poet, who had occasion to introduce these characters in a comedy, were to give the same uniform colour of language to them all, the style of that comedy, however elegant, would be unnatural.—Our language is also affected by the very thoughts we utter. When these are lofty or groveling, there is a correspondent elevation or meanness in the language. The style of a great man is generally simple, but seldom fails to partake of the dignity and energy of his sentiments. In Greece and Rome, the corruption of literature was a consequence of the corruption of manners; and the manly simplicity of the old writers disappeared, as the nation became effeminate and servile. Horace and Longinus\* scruple

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 323.—332. Longinus, sect. 9. 44.

not to ascribe the decline of eloquence, in their days, to a littleness of mind, the effect of avarice and luxury. The words of Longinus are remarkable. “ The truly eloquent “ (says he) must possess an exalted and noble “ mind ; for it is not possible for those who “ have all their lives been employed in ser- “ vile pursuits, to produce any thing worthy “ of immortal renown or general admira- “ tion.” In fact, our words not only are the signs, but may be considered as the pictures of our thoughts. The same glow or faintness of colouring, the same consistency or incoherence, the same proportions of great and little, the same degrees of elevation, the same light and shade, that distinguish the one, will be found to characterise the other : and from such a character as Achilles or Othello we as naturally expect a bold, nervous, and animated phraseology, as a manly voice and commanding gesture.—It is hardly necessary to add, that style, in order to be natural, must be adapted to the *sex* and to the *nation* of the speaker. These circumstances give a peculiarity to human thought, and must therefore diversify the modes of human language. I will not say, as some have done, that a lady is always distinguishable by her style and handwriting, as well as by her voice and features ; but I believe it may be truly said, that female conversation, even when learned or philosophical, has, for the most part, an ease and

and a delicacy, which the greatest masters of language would find it difficult to imitate. The style that Shakespeare has given to Juliet's nurse, Mrs Quickly, Desdemona, or Katharine, would not suit any male; nor the phraseology of Dogberry or Petruchio, Pistol or Falstaff, any female character. National peculiarities are also to be attended to by those who study natural language in its full extent. We should expect a copious and flowery style from an Asiatic monarch, and a concise and figurative expression from an American chief. A French marquis, and a country-gentleman of England, would not use the same phrases on the same subject, even though they were speaking the same language with equal fluency. And a *valet-de-chambre* newly imported from Paris, or a Scotch footman who had been born and bred in Edinburgh, appearing in an English comedy, would be censured as an unnatural character, if the poet were to make him speak pure English.

May we not infer, from what has been said, that "Language is then according to nature, when it is suitable to the supposed condition of the speaker?"—meaning by the word *condition*, not only the outward circumstances of *fortune, rank, employment, sex, age, and nation*, but also the internal temperature of the *understanding and passions*, as well as the peculiar nature of the *thoughts* that may happen to occupy the mind. Ho-  
race

race seems to have had this in view, when he said, that “if what is spoken on the stage shall be unfuitable to the *fortunes* of the speaker, both the learned and unlearned part of the audience will be sensible of the impropriety:—For that it is of great importance to the poet to consider, whether the person speaking be a slave or a hero; a man of mature age, or warm with the passions of youth; a lady of rank, or a bustling nurse; a luxurious Assyrian, or a cruel native of Colchis; a mercantile traveller, or a stationary husbandman; an acute Argive, or a dull Beotian\*.”

But Horace’s remark, it may be said, refers more immediately to the style of the drama; whereas we would extend it to poetry, and even to composition, in general. And it may be thought, that in those writings wherein the imitation of human life is less perfect, as in the Epic poem, or wherein the style is uniformly elevated and pure, as in History and Tragedy, this rule of language is not attended to. In what respect, for example, can the style of Livy or Homer be said to be suitable to the condition of the speaker? Have we not, in each author, a great variety of speeches, ascribed to men of different nations, ranks, and characters; who are all, notwithstanding, made to utter a language, that is not only grammatical,

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 112.

but elegant and harmonious? Yet no reader is offended; and no critic ever said, that the style of Homer or Livy is unnatural.

The objection is plausible. But a right examination of it will be found not to weaken, but to confirm and illustrate the present doctrine. I say, then, that language is natural, when it is suited to the supposed condition and circumstances of the speaker.— Now, in history, the speaker is no other than the historian himself; who claims the privilege of telling his tale in his own way; and of expressing the thoughts of other men, where he has occasion to record them, in his own language. All this we must allow to be natural, if we suppose him to be serious. For every man, who speaks without affectation, has a style and a manner peculiar to himself. A person of learning and eloquence, recapitulating on any solemn occasion the speech of a clown, would not be thought in earnest if he did not express himself with his wonted propriety. It would be difficult, perhaps he would find it impossible, to imitate the hesitation, barbarisms, and broad accent, of the poor man; and if he were to do so, he would affront his audience, and, instead of being thought a natural speaker, or capable of conducting important business, would prove himself a mere buffoon. Now an historian is a person who assumes a character of great dignity, and addresses himself to a most respectable audi-

ence. He undertakes to communicate information, not to his equals only or inferiors, but to the greatest, and most learned men upon earth. He wishes them to listen to him, and to listen with pleasure, to believe his testimony, and treasure up his sayings as lessons of wisdom, to direct them in the conduct of life, and in the government of kingdoms. In so awful a presence, and with views so elevated, what style is it natural for him to assume? A style uniformly serious, and elegant, clear, orderly, and emphatical, set off with modest ornaments to render it pleasing, yet plain and simple, and such as becomes a man whose chief concern it is to know and deliver the truth. The moralist and the preacher are in similar circumstances, and will naturally adopt a similar style: only a more sublime and more pathetic energy, and language still plainer than that of the historian, though not less pure, will with reason be expected from those, who pronounce the dictates of divine wisdom, and profess to instruct the meanest, as well as the greatest of mankind, in matters of everlasting importance.

When a man, for the public amusement, assumes any character, it is not necessary, nor possible, for him to impose upon us so far as to make us believe him to be the very person he represents: but we have a right to expect that his behaviour shall not belie his pretensions in any thing material. With all  
his



his powers of incantation, Garrick himself will never be able to charm us into a belief, that he is really Macbeth: all that can be done he does; he speaks and acts just as if he were that person: and this is all that the public requires of him. Were he to fall short,—or rather (for we need not suppose what will never happen)—were any other tragedian to fall short of our expectations, and plead, by way of excuse, that truly he was neither a king nor a traitor, neither an ambitious nor a valiant man, and therefore ought not to be blamed for not acting as becomes one; we should more easily pardon the fault, than the apology.—Now it is very true, that an Epic poet is no more inspired than any other writer, and perhaps was never seriously believed to be so. But as he lays claim to inspiration; and before the whole world professes to display the most interesting and most marvellous events, to be particularly informed in regard to the thoughts as well as actions of men, and to know the affairs of invisible beings and the economy of unseen worlds; we have a right to expect from him a language as much elevated above that of history and philosophy, as his assumed character and pretensions are higher than those of the historian and philosopher. From such a man, supposed to be invested with such a character, we have indeed a right to require every possible perfection of human thought and language. And

therefore, if he were to introduce mean persons talking in their own dialect, it would be as unnatural, as if a great orator, on the most solemn occasion, were to lisp and prattle like a child; or a hero to address his victorious army in the jargon of a gypsy or pickpocket.

In the Epopee, the Muse, or rather the Poet, is supposed to speak from beginning to end; the incidental orations ascribed to Therfites or Nestor, to Ulysses or Polypheme, to Ascanius or Eneas, to Satan or Raphael, not being delivered, as in tragedy, by the several speakers in their own persons, but rehearsed by the poet in the way of narrative. These orations, therefore, must not only be adapted to the characters of those to whom they are ascribed, and to the occasion upon which they are spoken, but must also partake of the supposed dignity of the poet's character. And if so, they must be elevated to the general pitch of the composition; even though they be said to have been uttered by persons from whom, in common life, elegance of style would not have been expected. And a certain degree of the same elevation must adhere to every description in Epic poetry, though the thing described should be comparatively unimportant: — which is no more than we naturally look for, when an eloquent man, in a solemn assembly, gives a detail of ordinary events, or recapitulates, in his own style and manner, the sentiments of an

an illiterate peasant. So that in the Epic poem, (and in all serious poetry, narrative or didactic, wherein the poet is the speaker), language, in order to be natural, must be suited to the assumed or supposed character of the poet, as well as to the occasion and subject. Polyphemus, in a farce or comedy, might speak clownishly; because he there appears in person, and rusticity is his character: but Homer and Virgil, rehearsing a speech of Polyphemus, would indeed deliver thoughts suitable to his character and condition, but would express them in their own elegant and harmonious language.— And hence we see, how absurdly those critics argue, who blame Virgil for making Eneas *too poetical* (as they are pleased to phrase it) in the account he gives Dido of his adventures. They might with equal reason affirm, that every person in the Iliad and Odyssey, as well as Eneid, speaks too poetically. The mistake arises from confounding Epic with Dramatic composition, and supposing that the heroes both of the one and of the other speak in their own persons. Whereas, in the first the poet is the only speaker, and in the last he never speaks at all: nay, the first is nothing more, from beginning to end, but a narration, or speech, delivered by a person assuming, and pretending to support, the character of an inspired poet. In the style, therefore, of the Epopee, the poetic character must every where

where predominate, as well as the heroic; because a speech, in order to appear natural, must be suited to the supposed character of the speaker, as well as to the things and persons spoken of.

The puns that Milton ascribes to his devils, on a certain occasion \*, are generally and justly condemned. It has, however, been urged, as an apology for them, that they are uttered by evil beings, who may be supposed to have lost, when they fell, all taste for elegance, as well as for virtue; and that the poet, on this one occasion, might have intended to make them both detestable as devils, and despicable as buffoons. But this plea cannot be admitted. For the fiends of Milton, notwithstanding their extreme wickedness, retain an elevation of mind, without which they could not have appeared in an Epic poem, and which is inconsistent with the futility of a buffoon or witling. Granting, then, (what is not likely), that the poet, in this one instance, meant to render them contemptible for their low wit, he must yet be blamed for assigning them a part so repugnant to their general character. Or, even if he could be vindicated on this score, he is liable to censure for having put so paltry a part of his narration in the mouth of the holy angel Raphael. Or, if even for this we were to pardon him, still he is in-

\* Paradise Lost, book 6. vers. 609. — 627.

excuseable, for having forgotten the assumed dignity of his own character so far, as to retail those wretched quibbles; which, whether we suppose them to be uttered by an angel, a devil, or an epic poet, are grossly unnatural, because totally unfuitable to the condition and character of the speaker. — A mind possessed with great ideas does not naturally attend to such as are trifling\*; and, while actuated by admiration, and other important emotions, will not be apt to turn its view to those things that provoke contempt or laughter. Such we suppose the mind of every sublime writer to be; and such in fact it must be, as long at least as he employs himself in sublime composition.

\* Who that, from Alpine heights, his labouring eye  
Shoots round the wide horizon, to survey  
The Nile or Ganges roll his wasteful tide  
Through mountains, plains, through empires black  
    with shade,  
And continents of sand, will turn his gaze  
To mark the windings of a scanty rill,  
That murmurs at his feet?

*Pleasures of Imagination, book 1.*

“The meditations,” says a very ingenious writer, (speaking of the view from Mount Etna), “are ever elevated in proportion to the grandeur and sublimity of the objects that surround us; and here, where you have all nature to rouse your imagination, what man can remain inactive?” See the whole passage; which, from its sublimity, one would be tempted to think had been composed on the spot;

*Bryden's Travels, letter 10.*

Mean language, therefore, or ludicrous sentiment, are unnatural in an Epic poem, for this reason, among others, that they do not naturally occur while one is composing it. And hence Milton's humorous description of the *limbo of Vanity* \*, however just as an allegory, however poignant as a satire, ought not to have obtained a place in *Paradise Lost*. Such a thing might suit the volatile genius of Ariosto and his followers; but is quite unworthy of the sober and well-principled disciple of Homer and Virgil.

In Dramatic Poetry, the persons act and speak in their own character, and the author never appears at all. An elevated style may, however, be natural in tragedy, on account of the high rank of the persons, and of the important affairs in which they are engaged. Even Comedy, who takes her characters from the middle and lower ranks of mankind, may occasionally lift up her voice, as Horace says †, when she means to give utterance to any important emotion, or happens to introduce a personage of more than ordinary dignity. — But what if persons of low condition should make their appearance in Tragedy? And as the great must have attendants, how can this be guarded against? And if such persons appear,

\* *Paradise Lost*, book 3. vers. 444.

† Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 92.

will not their language be unnatural, if raised to a level with that of their superiors? Or, would it not give a motley cast to the poem, if it were to fall below that level? — No doubt, an uniform colour of language, though not essential to Tragi-comedy, or to the Historic drama, is indispensable in a regular tragedy. But persons of mean rank, if the tragic poet find it necessary to bring them in, may easily be supposed to have had advantages of education to qualify them for bearing a part in the dialogue, or for any other office in which he may think proper to employ them. — Besides, language admits of many degrees of elevation; and a particular turn of fancy, or temperature of the passions, will sometimes give wonderful sublimity to the style even of a peasant or of a savage. So that the style of tragedy, notwithstanding its elevation, may be as various as the characters and passions of men, and may yet in each variety be natural. — Moreover, the subject, and consequently the emotions, of tragedy, are always important; and important emotions prevailing in the mind of a peasant will exalt and invigorate his language. When the old shepherd in *Douglas* exclaims, “Blest be the day that made me a poor man; My poverty has saved my master’s house;” the thought and the words, though sufficiently tragical, have no greater elevation, than

we should expect from any person of his character and circumstances. Simplicity of style, for which none are disqualified by the meanness of their condition, often enforces a sublime or pathetic sentiment with the happiest effect.—Let it be observed further, that poetical language is an imitation of real language improved to a state of perfection; and therefore, that the style of tragedy, though raised above that of common life, will never offend, so long as its elevations are at all consistent with probability. In fact, when the passions are well expressed, and the characters well drawn, a tragic poet needs not fear, that he shall be found fault with for the elegance of his language: tho' no doubt a great master will always know how to proportion the degree of elegance to the character of the speaker.

The dignity of a Tragic hero may be so great as to require an elevation of language equal to the pitch of Epic poetry itself. This might be exemplified from many of the speeches of Lear, Othello, Hamlet, and Cato, and of Samson in the Agonistes. But, in general, the Epic style is to be distinguished from the Tragic, by a more uniform elevation, and more elaborate harmony: because a poet, assuming the character of calm inspiration, and rather relating the feelings of others, than expressing his own, would speak with more composure, steadiness, and art,



art, than could reasonably be expected from those who deliver their thoughts according to the immediate impulse of passion.

The language of Comedy is that of common life improved in point of correctness; but not much elevated; — both because the speakers are of the middle and lower ranks of mankind, and also because the affairs they are engaged in give little scope to those emotions that exalt the mind, and rouse the imagination. — As to the style of farce, which is frequently blended with comedy; — it is purposely degraded below that of common life; or rather, it is the ridiculous language of common life made more ridiculous. I have already remarked, that Farce is to Poetry, what Caricatura is to Painting: as in the last we look for no beauty of attitude or feature, so neither in the first do we expect elegance of diction. Absurdity of thought produces absurdity of words and behaviour: the true farcical character is more extravagantly and more uniformly absurd, than the droll of real life; and his language, in order to be natural, must be exaggerated accordingly. Yet as nothing is esteemed in the fine arts, but what displays the ingenuity of the artist, I should imagine, that, even in a farce, one would not receive much pleasure from mere incongruity of words or actions; because that may be so easily invented. Studied absurdity cannot be

entertaining, unless it be in some degree uncommon\*.

We may therefore repeat, and lay it down as a maxim, That “ language is natural, “ when it is suited to the speaker’s condition, “ character, and circumstances.” And as, for the most part, the images and sentiments of serious poetry are copied from the images and sentiments, not of real, but of improved, nature †; so the language of serious poetry must (as hinted already) be a transcript, not of the real language of nature, which is often dissonant and rude, but of natural language improved as far as may be consistent with probability, and with the supposed character of the speaker. If this be not the case, if the language of poetry be such only as we hear in conversation, or read in history, it will, instead of delight, bring disappointment: because it will fall short of what we expect from an art which is recommended rather by its pleasurable qualities, than by its intrinsic utility; and to which, in order to render it pleasing, we grant higher privileges, than to any other kind of literary composition, or any other mode of human language.

The next inquiry must therefore be, “ How “ is the language of nature to be improved ?” or rather, “ What are those improvements

\* Essay on Laughter, chap. 3.

† See above, part I, chap. 3. 4. 5.

“ that peculiarly belong to the language of  
 “ poetry ? ”

## S E C T. II.

*Natural language is improved in poetry by  
 the use of Poetical words.*

ONE mode of improvement peculiar to poetical diction results from the use of those words, and phrases, which, because they rarely occur in prose, and frequently in verse, are by the grammarian and lexicographer termed *Poetical*. In these some languages abound more than others : but no language I am acquainted with is altogether without them ; and perhaps no language can be so, in which any number of good poems have been written. For poetry is better remembered than prose, especially by poetical authors ; who will always be apt to imitate the phraseology of those they have been accustomed to read and admire : and thus, in the works of poets, down through successive generations, certain phrases may have been conveyed, which, though originally perhaps in common use, are now confined to poetical composition. Prose-writers are not so apt to imitate one another, at least in words and phrases ; both because they do not  
 so

so well remember one another's phraseology, and also because their language is less artificial, and must not, if they would make it easy and flowing, (without which it cannot be elegant), depart essentially from the style of correct conversation. Poets too, on account of the greater difficulty of their numbers, have, both in the choice and in the arrangement of words, a better claim to indulgence, and stand more in need of a discretionary power.

The language of Homer differs materially from what was written and spoken in Greece in the days of Socrates. It differs in the mode of inflection, it differs in the syntax, it differs even in the words; so that one might read Homer with ease, who could not read Xenophon; or Xenophon, without being able to read Homer. Yet I cannot believe, that Homer, or the first Greek poet who wrote in his style, would make choice of a dialect quite different from what was intelligible in his own time; for poets have in all ages written with a view to be read, and to be read with pleasure; which they could not be, if their diction were hard to be understood. It is more reasonable to suppose, that the language of Homer is according to some ancient dialect, which, though not perhaps in familiar use among the Greeks at the time he wrote, was however intelligible. From the Homeric to the Socratic age, a period had elapsed of no less than four hundred

dred years; during which the style both of discourse and of writing must have undergone great alterations. Yet the Iliad continued the standard of heroic poetry, and was considered as the very perfection of poetical language; notwithstanding that some words in it were become so antiquated, or so ambiguous, that Aristotle himself seems to have been somewhat doubtful in regard to their meaning\*. And if Chaucer's merit as a poet had been as great as Homer's, and the English tongue under Edward the Third, as perfect as the Greek was in the second century after the Trojan war, the style of Chaucer would probably have been our model for poetical diction at this day; even as Petrarcha, his contemporary, is still imitated by the best poets of Italy.

I have somewhere read, that the rudeness of the style of Ennius was imputed by the old critics to his having copied too closely the dialect of common life. But this, I presume, must be a mistake. For, if we compare the fragments of that author with the comedies of Plautus, who flourished in the same age, and whose language was certainly copied from that of common life, we shall be struck with an air of antiquity in the former, that is not in the latter. Ennius, no doubt, like most other sublime poets, affected something of the antique in his expression: and many

\* Aristot. Poet. cap. 25.

of his words and phrases, not adopted by any prose-writer now extant, are to be found in Lucretius and Virgil, and were by them transmitted to succeeding poets. These form part of the Roman poetical dialect; which appears from the writings of Virgil, where we have it in perfection, to have been very copious. The style of this charming poet is indeed so different from prose, and is altogether so peculiar, that it is perhaps impossible to analyse it on the common principles of Latin grammar. And yet no author can be more perspicuous or more expressive; notwithstanding the frequency of Grecism in his syntax, and his love of old words, which he, in the judgement of Quintilian, knew better than any other man how to improve into decoration\*.

The poetical dialect of modern Italy is so different from the prosaic, that I have known persons who read the historians, and even spoke with tolerable fluency the language of that country, but could not easily construe a page of Petrarcha or Tasso. Yet it is not probable, that Petrarcha, whose works are a standard of the Italian poetical diction †, made any material innovations in his native tongue. I rather believe, that he wrote it nearly as it was spoken in his time, that is,

\* Quintil. Instit. viii. 3. § 3.

† Vicende della letteratura del Denina, cap. 4.

in the fourteenth century ; omitting only harsh combinations, and taking that liberty which Homer probably, and Virgil certainly, took before him, of reviving such old, but not obsolete expressions, as seemed peculiarly significant and melodious ; and polishing his style to that degree of elegance which human speech, without becoming unnatural, may admit of, and which the genius of poetry, as an art subservient to pleasure, may be thought to require.

The French poetry in general is distinguished from prose rather by the rhyme and the measure, than by any old or uncommon phraseology. Yet the French, on certain subjects, imitate the style of their old poets, of Marot in particular ; and may therefore be said to have something of a poetical dialect, tho' far less extensive than the Italian, or even than the English. And it may, I think, be presumed, that in future ages they will have more of this dialect than they have at present. This I would infer from the very uncommon merit of some of their late poets, particularly Boileau and La Fontaine, who, in their respective departments, will continue to be imitated, when the present modes of French prose are greatly changed : an event that, for all the pains they take to preserve their language, must inevitably happen, and whereof there are not wanting some presages already.

The English poetical dialect is not characterised

characterised by any peculiarities of inflection, nor by any great latitude in the use of foreign idioms. More copious it is, however, than one would at first imagine. I know of no author who has considered it in the way of detail \*. — What follows is but a very short specimen.

1. A few Greek and Latin idioms are

\* Since writing the above, I have had the pleasure to read the following judicious remarks on this subject. “ The language of the age is never the language of “ poetry, except among the French, whose verse, where “ the sentiment or image does not support it, differs in “ nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the contrary, “ has a language peculiar to itself; to which almost every “ one that has written has added something, by enrich- “ ing it with foreign idioms and derivatives; nay, some- “ times words of their own composition or invention. “ Shakespeare and Milton have been great creators this “ way; and no one more licentious than Pope or Dry- “ den, who perpetually borrow expressions from the “ former. Let me give you some instances from Dryden, “ whom every body reckons a great master of our poet- “ ical tongue. Full of *musical mopings* — unlike the “ *trim* of love — a pleasant *beverage* — a *roundelay* of “ love — stood silent in his *mood* — with knots and “ *knarcs* deformed — his *ireful mood* — in proud *array* “ — his *boon* was granted — and *disarray* and shameful “ rout — *wayward* but wise — *furbished* for the field — “ *dodder’d* oaks — *disberited* — *smouldering* flames — *retch-* “ *less* of laws — *crones* old and ugly — the *beldam* at his “ side — the *grandam* — *bag* — *villanize* his father’s fame. “ — But they are infinite: and our language not be- “ ing a settled thing, (like the French), has an un- “ doubted right to words of an hundred years old, pro- “ vided antiquity have not rendered them unintelligible.”

Mr Gray’s Letters, sect. 3. letter 4.

common



common in English poetry, which are seldom or never to be met with in prose. QUENCHED OF HOPE. Shakespeare. — SHORN OF HIS BEAMS. Milton. — *Created thing* NOR VALUED HE NOR SHUN'D. Milton. — 'Tis thus we riot, while WHO SOW IT STARVE. Pope. — *This day* BE BREAD AND PEACE MY LOT. Pope. — INTO WHAT PIT THOU SEE'ST FROM WHAT HEIGHT FALLEN. Milton. — *He deceived The mother of mankind,* WHAT TIME HIS PRIDE HAD CAST HIM *out of heaven.* Milton. — Some of these, with others to be found in Milton, seem to have been adopted for the sake of brevity, which in the poetical tongue is indispensable. For the same reason, perhaps, the articles *a* and *the* are sometimes omitted by our poets, though less frequently in serious than burlesque composition \*. — In English, the adjective generally goes before the substantive, the no-

\* In the Greek poetry, the omission of the article is more frequent than the use of it. The very learned and ingenious author of *A Treatise On the origin and progress of Language*, supposes, that in the time of Homer, who established their poetical language, the article was little used by the Greeks : and this supposition appears highly probable, when we consider, that in the Latin, which was derived from the Pelasgic tongue, (a very ancient dialect of Greek), there is no article. Yet, though the article had been in use in Homer's age, I imagine, that he, and every other Greek poet who wrote hexameters, would have often found it *necessary* to leave it out.

minative before the verb, and the active verb before (what we call) the accusative. Exceptions, however, to this rule, are not uncommon even in prose. But in poetry they are more frequent. *Their homely joys, and*  
 DESTINY OBSCURE. *Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight; and all the air a solemn stillness holds.* In general, that versification may be less difficult, and the cadence more uniformly pleasing; and sometimes, too, in order to give energy to expression, or vivacity to an image, — the English poet is permitted to take much greater liberties, than the prose-writer, in arranging his words, and modulating his lines and periods. Examples may be seen in every page of Paradise Lost.

2. Some of our poetical words take an additional syllable, that they may suit the verse the better; as, *dispart, distain, disport, affright, enchain*, for part, stain, sport, fright, chain. Others seem to be nothing else than common words made shorter, for the convenience of the versifier. Such are *auxiliar, sublunar, trump, vale, part, clime, submiss, frolic, plain, drear, dread, helm, morn, mead, eve and even, gan, illumine and illumine, ope, hoar, bide, swage, scape*; for auxiliary, sublunary, trumpet, valley, depart, climate, submissive, frolicsome, complain, dreary, dreadful, helmet, morning, meadow, evening, began or began to, illuminate, open, hoary, abide, alluage, escape. — Of some of these the short

short form is the more ancient. In Scotland, *even*, *morn*, *bide*, *fwage*, are still in vulgar use; but *morn*, except when contradistinguished to *even*, is synonymous, not with *morning*, (as in the English poetical dialect), but with *morrow*.—The Latin poets, in a way somewhat similar, and perhaps for a similar reason, shortened *fundamentum*, *tutamentum*, *munimentum*, &c. into *fundamen*, *tutamen*, *munimen* \*.

3. Of the following words, which are now almost peculiar to poetry, the greater part are ancient, and were once no doubt in common use in England, as many of them still are in Scotland. *Afield*, *amain*, *annoy* (a noun), *anon*, *aye* (ever), *behest*, *blithe*, *brand* (sword), *bridal*, *carol*, *dame* (lady), *featly*, *fell* (an adjective), *gaude*, *gore*, *host* (army), *lambkin*, *late* (of late), *lay* (poem), *lea*, *glade*, *gleam*, *hurl*, *lore*, *meed*, *orisons*, *plod* (to travel laboriously), *ringle*, *rue* (a verb), *ruth*, *ruthless*, *sojourn* (a noun), *smite*, *speed* (an active verb), *save* (except), *spray* (twig), *steed*, *strain* (song), *strand*, *swain*, *thrall*, *thrill*, *trail* (a verb), *troll*, *wail*, *welter*, *warble*, *wayward*, *woo*, *the while* (in the mean time), *yon*, *of yore*.

\* — Quod poetæ alligati ad certam pedum necessitatem, non semper propriis uti possint, sed depulsi a recta via necessario ad eloquendi quædam diverticula confugiant; nec mutare quædam modo verba, sed *extendere*, *carripere*, *convertere*, *dividere*, cogantur.

Quintilian.

4. These that follow are also poetical ; but, so far as I know, were never in common use. *Appal, arrowy, attune, battailous, breezy, car* (chariot), *clarion, cates, courser, darkling, flicker, floweret, emblaze, gairish, circlet, impearl, nightly, noiseless, pinion* (wing), *shadowy, slumberous, streamy, troublous, wilder* (a verb), *sbrill* (a verb), *sbook* (shaken), *mad-ding, viewless*.—I suspect too, that the following, derived from the Greek and Latin, are peculiar to poetry. *Clang, clangor, choral, bland, boreal, dire, ensanguined, ire, ireful, lave* (to wash), *nymph* (lady, girl), *orient, panoply, philomel, infuriate, jocund, radiant, rapt, redolent, resurgent, verdant, vernal, zypher, zone* (girdle), *sylvan, suffuse*.

5. In most languages, the rapidity of pronunciation abbreviates some of the commonest words, or even joins two, or perhaps more, of them, into one ; and some of these abbreviated forms find admission into writing. The English language was quite disfigured by them in the end of the last century ; but Swift, by his satire and example, brought them into disrepute : and, though some of them be retained in conversation, as *don't, shan't, can't*, they are now avoided in solemn style ; and by elegant writers in general, except where the colloquial dialect is imitated, as in comedy. *'Tis* and *'twas*, since the time of Shaftesbury, seem to have been daily losing credit, at least in prose ; but still have a place in poetry ; perhaps be-  
cause

cause they contribute to conciseness. *'Twas on a lofty vase's side.* Gray. *'Tis true, 'tis certain, man though dead retains part of himself.* Pope. In verse too, *over* may be shortened into *o'er*, (which is the Scotch, and probably was the old English, pronunciation), *ever* into *e'er*, and *never* into *ne'er*; and from *the* and *to*, when they go before a word beginning with a vowel, the final letter is sometimes cut off. *O'er hills, o'er dales, o'er crags, o'er rocks they go.* Pope. *Where'er she turns, the Graces homage pay. And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave. Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll.* Gray. *T'alarm th' eternal midnight of the grave.* —

These abbreviations are now peculiar to the poetical tongue, but not necessary to it. They sometimes promote brevity, and render versification less difficult.

6. Those words which are commonly called *compound epithets*, as *rosy-finger'd*, *rosy-bosom'd*, *many-twinkling*, *many-sounding*, *moss-grown*, *bright-eyed*, *straw-built*, *spirit-stirring*, *incense-breathing*, *heaven-taught*, *love-whispering*, *lute-resounding*, are also to be considered as part of our poetical dialect. It is true we have compounded adjectives in familiar use, as *high-seasoned*, *well-natured*, *ill-bred*, and innumerable others. But I speak of those that are less common, that seldom occur except in poetry, and of which in prose the use would appear affected. And that they sometimes promote brevity and vivacity of expression,

expression, cannot be denied. But, as they give, when too frequent, a stiff and finical air to a performance; as they are not always explicit in the sense, nor agreeable in the sound; as they are apt to produce a confusion, or too great a multiplicity of images; as they tend to disfigure the language, and furnish a pretext for endless innovation; I would have them used sparingly; and those only used, which the practice of popular authors has rendered familiar to the ear, and which are in themselves peculiarly emphatical and harmonious. For I cannot think, with Dacier and Sanadon, that this well-known verse in Horace's Art of Poetry,

Dixeris egregie, notum si callida verbum  
Reddiderit junctura novum——

gives any warrant, even to a Latin poet, for the formation of these compound words; which, if I mistake not, were more fashionable in the days of Ennius, than of Horace and Virgil\*.

7. In

\* The critics are divided about the meaning of this passage. Horace is speaking of *new words*; which he allows to be sometimes necessary; but which, he says, ought to be *sparingly* and *cautiously* introduced; In verbis etiam tenuis cautusque ferendis; and then subjoins the words quoted in the text, Dixeris egregie, &c.

1. Some think, that this *callida junctura* refers to the formation of *compound epithets*, as *velivolus*, *saxifragus*,  
I solivagus,

7. In the transformation of nouns into verbs and participles, our poetical dialect admits

folivagus, &c. ; and that the import of the precept is this :  
 “ Rather than by bringing in a word altogether new,  
 “ even when a new word is necessary, you should ex-  
 “ press yourself by two known words artfully joined to-  
 “ gether into one, so as to assume a new appearance,  
 “ and to admit a new though analogical signification.”  
 This might no doubt be done with propriety in some cases. But I cannot think, that Horace is here speaking of compound words. — For, first, this sort of words were much more suitable to the genius of the Greek than of the Latin tongue ; as Quintilian somewhere insinuates, and every body knows who is at all acquainted with these languages. — Secondly, we find in fact, that these words are less frequent in Horace and Virgil, than in the older poets ; whence we may infer, that they became less fashionable as the Latin tongue advanced nearer to perfection. — Thirdly, Virgil is known to have introduced three or four new words from the Greek, *Lychni*, *Spelæa*, *Thyas*, &c. ; but it does not appear, that either Virgil or Horace ever fabricated one of these compound words ; and it is not probable, that Horace would recommend a practice, which neither himself nor Virgil had ever warranted by his example. — Fourthly, our author, in his illustrations upon the precept in question, affirms, that new words will more easily obtain currency if taken from the Greek tongue ; and Virgil, if we may judge of his opinions by his practice, appears to have been of the same mind. And there was good reason for it. The Greek and Latin are kindred languages ; and as the former was much studied at Rome, there was no risk of introducing any obscurity into the Roman language by the introduction of a Greek word. — Lastly, it may be doubted, whether *junctura*, though it often denotes the composition of words in a sentence or clause (Quintil. ix. 4.), and sometimes arrangement or composition in general (Hor. Ar. Poet. versè 242.) — is ever used

mits of greater latitude than prose. Hymn, pillow, curtain, story, pillar, picture, peal, furge,

to express the union of syllables in a word, or of simple words in a compound epithet.

2. Other interpreters suppose, that this *callida junctura* refers to the arrangement of words in the sentence, and that the precept amounts to this: "When a new expression is necessary, you will acquit yourself well, if by means of an artful arrangement you can to a known word give a new signification." But one would think, that the observance of this precept must tend to the utter confusion of language. To give new significations to words in present use, must increase the ambiguity of language; which in every tongue is greater than it ought to be, and which would seem to be more detrimental to eloquence and even to literature, than the introduction of many new words of definite meaning. Those who favour this interpretation give *comæ sylvarum* for *folia*, as a phrase to exemplify the precept. But the foliage of a tree is not a new idea, nor could there be any need of a new word or new phrase to express it: though a poet, no doubt, on account of his verse, or on some other account, might chuse to express it by a *figure*, rather than by its *proper* name. *Comæ sylvarum* for *folia*, is neither less nor more than a metaphor, or, if you please, a catachresis; but Horace, is speaking, not of figurative language, but of new words. — Both these interpretations suppose, that the words of our poet are to be construed according to this order: *Dixeris egregie, si callida junctura reddiderit notum verbum novum.*

3. The best of all our poet's interpreters, the learned Dr Hurd, construes the passage in the same manner, and explains it thus: "Instead of framing new words, I recommend to you any kind of artful management, by which you may be able to give a new air and cast to old ones." And this explication he illustrates most ingeniously by a variety of examples, that throw great light on the subject of poetical diction. See his notes on the *Arts Poetica*.



furge, cavern, honey, career, cincture, bosom, sphere, are common nouns; but, *to hymn, to pillow, curtained, pillared, pictured, pealing, surging, cavern'd, bonied, careering, cinctured, bosomed, sphered*, would appear affected in prose, though in verse they are warranted by the very best authority.

Some late poets, particularly the imitators of Spenser, have introduced a great variety of uncommon words, as *certes, estfoons, ne, whilom, transmew, moil, fone, losel, albe, hight, dight, pight, thews, couthful, assot*,

I should ill consult my own credit, if I were to oppose my judgement, to that of this able critic and excellent author. Yet I would beg leave to say, that to me the poet seems, through this whole passage, from vers. 46. to vers. 72. to be speaking of the *formation of new words*; a practice whereof he allows the danger, but proves the necessity. And I find I cannot divest myself of an old prejudice in favour of another interpretation, which is more obvious and simple, and which I considered as the best, long before I knew it was authorized by that judicious annotator Joannes Bond, and by Dryden in his notes upon the *Eneid*, as well as by the Abbe Batteux in his commentary on Horace's *art of poetry*. “New words (says the poet) are to be cautiously and sparingly introduced; but, when necessary, an author will do well to give them such a position in the sentence, as that the reader shall be at no loss to discover their meaning.” For I would construe the passage thus, *Dixeris egregie, si callida junctura reddiderit novum verbum notum*. But why, it may be said, did not Horace, if this was really his meaning, put *novum* in the first line, and *notum* in the second? The answer is easy. His verse would not admit that order: for the first syllable of *novum* is short, and the first syllable of *notum* long.

muchel, wend arrear, &c. These were once poetical words, no doubt; but they are now obsolete, and to many readers unintelligible. No man of the present age, however conversant in this dialect, would naturally express himself in it on any interesting emergence; or, supposing this natural to the antiquarian, it would never appear so to the common hearer or reader. A mixture of these words, therefore, must ruin the pathos of modern language; and as they are not familiar to our ear, and plainly appear to be sought after and affected, will generally give a stiffness to modern versification. Yet in subjects approaching to the ludicrous they may have a good effect; as in the *Schoolmistress* of Shenstone, Parnel's Fairy-tale, Thomson's Castle of Indolence, and Pope's lines in the *Dunciad* upon Wormius. But this effect will be most pleasing to those who have least occasion to recur to the glossary.

But why, it may be asked, should these old words be more pathetic and pleasing in Spenser, than in his imitators? I answer, Because in him they seem, or we believe them to be, natural; in them we are sure that they are affected. In him there is an ease and uniformity of expression, that shows he wrote a language not materially different from what was written by all the serious poets of his time; whereas the mixed dialect of these imitators is plainly artificial, and such as would make any man ridiculous, if he were  
now

now to adopt it in conversation. A long beard may give dignity to the portrait, or statue of a hero, whom we know to have been two hundred years in his grave: but the chin of a modern European commander bristling with that antique appendage, would appear awkward and ridiculous. — But did not Spenser himself make use of words that are known to have been obsolete, or merely provincial, in his time? Yes; and those words in Spenser have the same bad effect, that words now obsolete have in his imitators; they are to most readers unintelligible, and to those who understand them appear ludicrous or affected. Some of his Eclogues, and even some passages in the Fairy Queen, are liable to this censure. — But what if Spenser had fixed the poetical language of England, as Homer did that of Greece? Would any of his old words in that case have appeared awkward in a modern poem? Perhaps they would not: but let it be observed, that, in that case, they would have been adopted by Milton, and Dryden, and Pope, and by all our serious poets since the age of Elizabeth; and would therefore have been perfectly intelligible to every reader of English verse; and, from our having been so long accustomed to meet with them in the most elegant compositions, would have acquired a dignity equal, or perhaps superior, to that which now belongs  
to

to the poetical language of Pope and Milton.

I grant, it is not always easy to fix the boundary between poetical and obsolete expressions. To many readers, *lore*, *meed*, *behest*, *blithe*, *gaude*, *spray*, *thrall*, may already appear antiquated; and to some the style of Spenser, or even of Chaucer, may be as intelligible as that of Dryden. This however we may venture to affirm, that a word, which the majority of readers cannot understand without a glossary, may with reason be considered as obsolete; and ought not to be used in modern composition, unless revived, and recommended to the public ear, by some very eminent writer. There are but few words in Milton, as *nathless*, *tine*, *frore*, *bosky*, &c.; there are but one or two in Dryden, as *falsify* \*; and in Pope, there are none at all, which every reader of our poetry may not be supposed to understand: whereas in Shakespeare there are many, and in Spenser many more, for which one who knows English very well may be obliged to consult the dictionary. The practice of Milton, Dryden, or Pope, may therefore, in almost all cases, be admitted as good authori-

\* Dryden in one place (*Æneid* ix. vers. 1095) uses *Falsified* to denote *Pierced through and through*. He acknowledges, that this use of the word is an innovation; and has nothing to plead for it but his own authority, and that *Falsare* in Italian sometimes means the same thing.

ty for the use of a poetical word. And in them, all the words above enumerated, as poetical, and in present use, may actually be found. And of such poets as may chuse to observe this rule, it will not be said, either that they reject the judgement of Quintilian, who recommends the newest of the old words, and the oldest of the new, or that they are unattentive to Pope's precept,

Be not the first by whom the new are tried,  
Nor yet the last to lay the old aside \*.

We must not suppose, that these poetical words never occur at all, except in poetry. Even from conversation they are not excluded; and the ancient critics allow, that they may be admitted into prose; where they occasionally confer dignity upon a sublime subject, or, for reasons elsewhere hinted at †, heighten the ludicrous qualities of a mean one. But it is in poetry only, where the frequent use of them does not favour of affectation.

Nor must we suppose them essential to this art. Many passages there are of exquisite poetry, wherein not a single phrase occurs, that might not be used in prose. In fact the influence of these words in adorning English verse is not very extensive. Some in-

\* Essay on Criticism, vers. 335.

† Essay on Laughter, chap. 2. sect. 4.

fluence however they have. They serve to render the poetical style, first, more melodious; and, secondly, more solemn.

First, They render the poetical style more melodious, and more easily reducible into measure. Words of unwieldy size, or difficult pronunciation, are never used by correct poets, where they can be avoided; unless in their sound they have something imitative of the sense. Homer's poetical inflections contribute wonderfully to the sweetness of his numbers: and if the reader is pleased to look back to the specimen I gave of the English poetical dialect, he will find that the words are in general well-sounding, and such as may coalesce with other words, without producing harsh combinations. Quintilian observes, that poets, for the sake of their verse, are indulged in many liberties, not granted to the orator, of lengthening, shortening, and dividing their words\*: — and if the Greek and Roman poets claimed this indulgence from necessity, and obtained it, the English, those of them especially who write in rhyme, may claim it with better reason; as the words of their language are less musical, and far less susceptible of variety in arrangement and syntax.

Secondly, Such poetical words as are known to be ancient have something venerable in their appearance, and impart a so-

\* Instit. Orat. lib. 10. cap. 1. § 3.

lemnity to all around them. This remark is from Quintilian; who adds, that they give to a composition that cast and colour of antiquity, which in painting is so highly valued, but which art can never effectually imitate\*. Poetical words that are either not ancient, or not known to be such, have however a pleasing effect from association. We are accustomed to meet with them in sublime and elegant writing; and hence they come to acquire sublimity and elegance:—even as the words we hear on familiar occasions come to be accounted familiar; and as those that take their rise among pick-pockets, gamblers, and gypsies, are thought too indelicate to be used by any person of taste or good manners. When one hears the following lines, which abound in poetical words,

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,  
 The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,  
 The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,  
 No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed:

—one is as sensible of the dignity of the language; as one would be of the vileness or vulgarity of that man's speech, who should prove his acquaintance with Bridewell, by interlarding his discourse with such

\* Lib. 8. cap. 3. § 3.

terms as *mill-doll*, *queer cull*, or *nubbing cheat*\*; or who, in imitation of fops and gamblers, should, on the common occasions of life, talk of being *beat hollow*, or *saving his distance* †. — What gives dignity to persons gives dignity to language. † A man of this character is one who has borne important employments, been connected with honourable associates, and never degraded himself by levity, or immorality of conduct. Dignified phrases are those which have been used to express elevated sentiments, have always made their appearance in elegant composition, and have never been profaned by giving permanency or utterance to the passions of the vile, the giddy, or the worthless. And as by an active old age, the dignity of such men is confirmed and heightened; so the dignity of such words, if they be not suffered to fall into disuse, seldom fails to improve by length of time.

\* See the Scoundrel's Dictionary.

† Language of Newmarket.



## S E C T.   III.

*Natural Language is improved in poetry, by means of Tropes and Figures.*

SO much for the nature and use of those words that are *poetical*, and yet not figurative. But from *Figurative Expression* there arises a more copious and important source of Poetic Eloquence. Some sorts of poetry are distinguished by the beauty, boldness, and frequency of the Figures, as well as by the measure, or by any of the contrivances above mentioned. And in prose we often meet with such figures and words, as we expect only in poetry; in which case the language is called *Poetical*: and in verse we sometimes find a diction so tame, and so void of ornament, that we brand it with the appellation of *Prosaic*.

As my design in this discourse is, not to deliver a system of rhetoric, but to explain the peculiar effects of poetry upon the mind, by tracing out the characters that distinguish this from other literary arts; it would be improper to enter here, with any degree of minuteness, into the philosophy of Tropes and Figures: these being ornamental, not to poetry only, but to human speech in general.

All that the present occasion requires will be performed, when it is shown, in what respects tropical and figurative language is more necessary to poetry than to any other sort of composition.

If it appear, that, by means of Figures, Language may be made more *pleasing*, and more *natural*, than it would be without them; it will follow, that to Poetic Language, whose end is to *please* by imitating *nature*, Figures must be not only ornamental, but necessary. I shall therefore, first, make a few remarks on the importance and utility of figurative language; secondly, show, that Figures are more necessary to poetry in general, than to any other mode of writing; and, thirdly, assign a reason why they are more necessary in some kinds of poetry than in others.

I. I purpose to make a few remarks on the importance and utility of Figurative Expression, in making language more pleasing and more natural.

1. The first remark is, that Tropes and Figures are often necessary to supply the unavoidable defects of language. When *proper* words are wanting, or not recollected, or when we do not chuse to be always repeating them, we must have recourse to tropes and figures.—When philosophers began to explain the operations of the mind, they found, that most of the words in common use, being framed to answer the more obvious exigencies of life, were in their *proper*

per signification applicable to matter only and its qualities. What was to be done in this case? Would they think of making a new language to express the qualities of mind? No: that would have been difficult, or impracticable; and granting it both practicable and easy, they must have foreseen, that nobody would read or listen to what was thus spoken or written in a new, and, consequently, in an unknown, tongue. They therefore took the language as they found it; and, where-ever they thought there was a similitude or analogy between the qualities of mind and the qualities of matter, scrupled not to use the names of the material qualities tropically, by applying them to the mental qualities. Hence came the phrases, *solidity* of judgement, *warmth* of imagination, *enlargement* of understanding, and many others; which, though figurative, express the meaning just as well as *proper* words would have done. In fact, numerous as the words in every language are, they must always fall short of the unbounded variety of human thoughts and perceptions. Tastes and smells are almost as numerous as the species of bodies. Sounds admit of perceptible varieties that surpass all computation, and the seven primary colours may be diversified without end. If each variety of external perception were to have a name, language would be insurmountably difficult; nay, if men were to appropriate a class of names to each particular

ticular sense, they would multiply words exceedingly, without adding any thing to the clearness of speech. Those words, therefore, that in their proper signification denote the objects of one sense, they often apply tropically to the objects of another; and say, sweet taste, sweet smell, sweet sound; sharp point, sharp taste, sharp sound; harmony of sounds, harmony of colours, harmony of parts; soft silk, soft colour, soft sound, soft temper; and so in a thousand instances; and yet these words, in their tropical signification, are not less intelligible than in their proper one; for sharp taste and sharp sound, are as expressive as sharp sword; and harmony of tones is not better understood by the musician, than harmony of parts by the architect, and harmony of colours by the painter.

Savages, illiterate persons, and children, have comparatively but few words in proportion to the things they may have occasion to speak of; and must therefore recur to tropes and figures more frequently, than persons of copious elocution. A seaman, or mechanic, even when he talks of that which does not belong to his art, borrows his language from that which does; and this makes his diction figurative to a degree that is sometimes entertaining enough. “ Death (says a seaman in one of Smollet’s novels) has not yet *bearded* my comrade; but they have been *yard arm and yard arm* these  
“ *three*

“ *three glasses*. His *starboard* eye is open,  
 “ but fast *jamm’d* in his head; and the  
 “ *baulyards* of his under jaw have given  
 “ way.” These phrases are exaggerated; but we allow them to be natural, because we know that illiterate people are apt to make use of tropes and figures taken from their own trade, even when they speak of things that are very remote and incongruous. In those poems, therefore, that imitate the conversation of illiterate persons, as in comedy, farce, and pastoral, such figures judiciously applied may render the imitation more pleasing, because more exact and natural.

Words that are untuneable and harsh the poet is often obliged to avoid, when perhaps he has no other way to express their meaning than by tropes and figures; and sometimes the measure of his verse may oblige him to reject a proper word that is not harsh, merely on account of its being too long, or too short, or in any other way unsuitable to the rhythm, or to the rhyme. And hence another use of figurative language, that it contributes to poetical harmony. Thus, *to press the plain* is frequently used to signify *to be slain in battle*; *liquid plain* is put for *ocean*, *blue serene* for *sky*, and *sylvan reign* for *country life*.

2. Tropes and Figures are favourable to delicacy. When the proper name of a thing is in any respect unpleasent, a well-chosen trope will convey the idea in such a way as to

to give no offence. This is agreeable, and even necessary, in polite conversation, and cannot be dispensed with in elegant writing of any kind. Many words, from their being often applied to vulgar use, acquire a meanness that disqualifies them for a place in serious poetry; while perhaps, under the influence of a different system of manners, the corresponding words in another language may be elegant, or at least not vulgar. When one reads Homer in the Greek, one takes no offence at his calling Eumeus by a name which, literally rendered, signifies *Swine-herd*; first, because the Greek word is well-sounding in itself; secondly, because we have never heard it pronounced in conversation, nor consequently debased by vulgar use; and, thirdly, because we know, that the office denoted by it was, in the age of Eumeus, both important and honourable. But Pope would have been blamed, if a name so indelicate as *swine-herd* had in his translation been applied to so eminent a personage; and therefore he judiciously makes use of the trope *synecdoche*, and calls him *Swain*\*; a word both elegant and poetical, and not likely to lead the reader into any mistake about the person spoken of, as his employment had been described in a preceding passage. The same Eumeus is said, in the simple, but melodious language of the ori-

\* Pope's Homer's Odyssæy, book 14. vers. 41.

ginal, to have been making his own shoes when Ulyffes came to his door; a work which in those days the greatest heroes would often find necessary. This too the translator softens by a tropical expression :

Here fat Eumeus, and his cares applied  
To form strong *buskins* of well-season'd hide.

A hundred other examples might be quoted from this translation; but these will explain my meaning.

There are other occasions, on which the delicacy of figurative language is still more needful: as in Virgil's account of the effects of animal love, and of the plague among the beasts, in the third Georgic; where Dryden's style, by being less figurative than the original, is in one place exceedingly filthy, and in another shockingly obscene.

Hobbes could construe a Greek author; but his skill in words must have been all derived from the dictionary: for he seems not to have known, that any one articulate sound could be more agreeable, or any one phrase more dignified, than any other. In his Iliad and Odyffey, even when he hits the author's sense, (which is not always the case), he proves, by his choice of words, that of harmony, elegance, or energy of style, he had no manner of conception. And hence that work, tho' called a Translation of Homer, does not even deserve the name of

*poem*; because it is in every respect *unpleasing*, being nothing more than a fictitious narrative delivered in mean prose, with the additional meanness of harsh rhyme, and untuneable measure.—Trapp understood Virgil well enough as a grammarian, and had a taste for his beauties; yet his Translation bears no resemblance to Virgil; which is owing to the same cause, an imprudent choice of words and figures, and a total want of harmony.

I grant, that the delicacy we here contend for may, both in conversation and in writing, be carried too far. To call *killing an innocent man in a duel* an affair of honour, and *a violation of the rights of wedlock* an affair of gallantry, is a prostitution of figurative language. Nor do I think it any credit to us, that we are said to have upwards of forty figurative phrases to denote excessive drinking. Language of this sort generally implies, that the public abhorrence of such crimes is not so strong as it ought to be: and I am not certain, whether even our morals might not be improved, if we were to call these and such like crimes by their proper names, murder, adultery, drunkenness, gluttony; names, that not only express our meaning, but also betoken our disapprobation.—As to writing, it cannot be denied, that even Pope himself, in the excellent version just now quoted, has sometimes, for the sake of his numbers, or for  
fear



fear of giving offence by too close an imitation of Homer's simplicity, employed tropes and figures too quaint or too solemn for the occasion. And the finical style is in part characterised by the writer's dislike to literal expressions, and affectedly substituting in their stead unnecessary tropes and figures. With these authors, a man's only child must always be his *only hope*, a country-maid becomes a *rural beauty*, or perhaps a *nymph of the groves*; if flattery sing at all, it must be a *syren song*; the shepherd's flute dwindles into an *oaten reed*, and his crook is exalted into a *scepter*; the *silver lillies* rise from their *golden beds*, and *languish* to the *complaining gale*. A young woman, though a good Christian, cannot make herself agreeable without *sacrificing to the Graces*; nor hope to do any execution among the *gentle swains*, till a whole legion of *Cupids*, armed with *flames* and *darts*, and other weapons, begin to discharge from her eyes their formidable artillery. For the sake of variety, or of the verse, some of these figures may now and then find a place in a poem; but in prose, unless very sparingly used, they favour of affectation.

3. Tropes and Figures promote brevity; and brevity, united with perspicuity, is always agreeable. An example or two will be given in the next paragraph. Sentiments thus delivered, and imagery thus painted, are readily apprehended by the mind, make

a strong impression upon the fancy, and remain long in the memory : whereas too many words, even when the meaning is good, never fail to bring disgust and weariness. They argue a debility of mind which hinders the author from seeing his thoughts in one distinct point of view ; and they also encourage a suspicion, that there is something faulty or defective in the matter. In the poetic style, therefore, which is addressed to the fancy and passions, and intended to make a vivid, a pleasing, and a permanent impression, brevity, and consequently tropes and figures, are indispensable. And a language will always be the better suited to poetical purposes, the more it admits of this brevity ; — a character which is more conspicuous in the Greek and Latin than in any modern tongue, and much less in the French than in the Italian or English.

4. Tropes and Figures contribute to strength or energy of language, not only by their conciseness, but also by conveying to the fancy ideas that are easily comprehended, and make a strong impression. We are powerfully affected with what we see, or feel, or hear. When a sentiment comes enforced or illustrated by figures taken from objects of sight, or touch, or hearing, one thinks, as it were, that one sees, or feels, or hears, the thing spoken of ; and thus, what in itself would perhaps be obscure, or is merely intellectual, may be made to seize our attention

tention and interest our passions almost as effectually as if it were an object of outward sense. When Virgil calls the Scipios *thunderbolts of war*, he very strongly expresses in one word, and by one image, the rapidity of their victories, the noise their achievements made in the world, and the ruin and consternation that attended their irresistible career. — When Homer calls Ajax *the bulwark of the Greeks*, he paints with equal brevity his vast size and strength, the difficulty of prevailing against him, and the confidence wherewith his countrymen reposed on his valour. — When Solomon says of the strange woman, or harlot, that “her feet go *down to death*,” he lets us know, not only that her path ends in destruction, but also, that they who accompany her will find it easy to go forwards to ruin, and difficult to return to their duty. — Satan’s enormous magnitude, and refulgent appearance, his perpendicular ascent through a region of darkness, and the inconceivable rapidity of his motion, are all painted out to our fancy by Milton, in one very short similitude,

Sprung upward, like — a pyramid of fire \* :

To take in the full meaning of which figure, we must imagine ourselves in chaos, and a vast luminous body rising upward, near the

\* Par. Lost, book 2. vers. 1013.

place where we are, so swiftly as to appear a continued track of light, and lessening to the view according to the increase of distance, till it end in a point, and then disappear; and all this must be supposed to strike our eye at one instant. — Equal to this in propriety, though not in magnificence, is that allegory of Gray,

The paths of glory lead but to the grave :

Which presents to the imagination a wide plain, where several roads appear, crowded with glittering multitudes, and issuing from different quarters, but drawing nearer and nearer as they advance, till they terminate in the dark and narrow house, where all their glories enter in succession, and disappear for ever. — When it is said in scripture, of a good man who died, that he *fell asleep*, what a number of ideas are at once conveyed to our imagination, by this beautiful and expressive figure! As a labourer, at the close of day, goes to sleep, with the satisfaction of having performed his work, and with the agreeable hope of awaking in the morning of a new day, refreshed and chearful; so a good man, at the end of life, resigns himself calm and contented to the will of his Maker, with the sweet reflection of having endeavoured to do his duty, and with the transporting hope of soon awaking in the regions of light, to life  
and

and happiness eternal. The figure also suggests, that to a good man the transition from life to death is even in the sensation no more painful, than when our faculties melt away into the pleasing insensibility of sleep.—— Satan flying among the stars is said by Milton to “*Sail* between worlds and worlds;” which has an elegance and force far superior to the proper word *Fly*. For by this allusion to a ship, we are made to form a lively idea of his great size, and to conceive of his motion, that it was equable and majestic.—— Virgil uses a happy figure to express the size of the great wooden horse, by means of which the Greeks were conveyed into Troy: “*Equum divina Palladis arte ædificant.*”—— Milton is still bolder when he says,

Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew  
Himself to sing, and *build the lofty rhyme* \*.

The phrase, however, though bold, is emphatical; and gives a noble idea of the durability of poetry, as well as of the art and

\* In the Latin phrase *Condere carmen*, which Milton no doubt had in his view, the verb is of more general signification, than the English verb *to build*; and therefore the figure is bolder in English than Latin. It may even be doubted, whether *Condere carmen* be at all figurative; for *Condere* is resolved by R. Stephanus into *Simul dare*. *Condere carmen, condere poema, condere historiam*, occur in Cicero and Pliny; but Milton's phrase is much too daring for English prose.

attention requisite to form a good poem. — There are hundreds of tropical expressions in common use, incomparably more energetic than any proper words of equal brevity that could be put in their place. A cheek *burning* with blushes, is a trope which at once describes the colour as it appears to the beholder, and the glowing heat as it is felt by the person blushing. *Chilled* with despondence, *petrified* with astonishment, *thunder-struck* with disagreeable and unexpected intelligence, *melted* with love or pity, *dissolved* in luxury, *hardened* in wickedness, *softening* into remorse, *inflamed* with desire, *tossed* with uncertainty, &c.—every one is sensible of the force of these and the like phrases, and that they must contribute to the energy of composition.

5. Tropes and Figures promote strength of expression, and are in poetry peculiarly requisite, because they are often more *natural*, and more *imitative*, than proper words. In fact, this is so much the case, that it would be impossible to imitate the language of passion without them. It is true, that when the mind is agitated, one does not run out into allegories, or long-winded similitudes, or any of the figures that require much attention and many words, or that tend to withdraw the fancy from the object of the passion. Yet the language of many passions must be figurative, notwithstanding; because they rouse the fancy, and direct it to

objects congenial to their own nature, which diversify the language of the speaker with a multitude of allusions. The fancy of a very angry man, for example, presents to his view a train of disagreeable ideas connected with the passion of anger, and tending to encourage it; and if he speak without restraint during the paroxysm of his rage, those ideas will force themselves upon him, and compel him to give them utterance. “ Infernal  
 “ monster! (he will say)—my blood boils  
 “ at him; he has used me like a dog; ne-  
 “ ver was man so injured as I have been by  
 “ this barbarian. He has no more sense  
 “ of propriety than a stone. His counte-  
 “ nance is diabolical, and his soul as ugly  
 “ as his countenance. His heart is cold and  
 “ hard, and his resolutions dark and bloody,”  
 &c. This speech is wholly figurative. It is made up of *metaphors* and *hyperboles*, which, with the *prosopopeia* and *apostrophe*, are the most passionate of all the figures.—Lear, driven out of doors by his unnatural daughters, in the midst of darkness, thunder, and tempest, naturally breaks forth (for his indignation is just now raised to the very highest pitch) into the following violent exclamation against the crimes of mankind, in which almost every word is figurative.

Tremble thou wretch,  
 That hast within thee undivulged crimes  
 Unwhipt of justice. Hide thee, thou bloody hand,  
 Thou

Thou perjured, and thou simular of virtue,  
 That art incestuous. Caitiff, to pieces shake,  
 That under covert, and convenient seeming,  
 Hast practised on man's life. Close pent-up guilts,  
 Rive your concealing continents, and cry  
 These dreadful summoners grace.

— The vehemence of maternal love, and sorrow from the apprehension of losing her child, make the Lady Constance utter a language that is strongly figurative, tho' quite suitable to the condition and character of the speaker. The passage is too long for a quotation, but concludes thus :

O Lord! my boy, my Arthur, my fair son,  
 My life, my joy, my food, my all the world,  
 My widow-comfort, and my sorrow's cure\*.

— Similar to this, and equally expressive of conjugal love, is that beautiful hyperbole in Homer; where Andromache, to dissuade her husband from going out to the battle, tells him, that she had now no mother, father, or brethren, all her kindred being dead, and her native country desolate; and then tenderly adds,

But while my Hector yet survives, I see  
 My father, mother, brethren, all in thee †.

\* King John.

† Iliad, book 6.



As the passions that agitate the soul, and rouse the fancy, are apt to vent themselves in tropes and figures, so those that depress the mind adopt for the most part a plain diction without any ornament. For to a dejected mind, wherein the imagination is generally inactive, it is not probable, that any great variety of ideas will present themselves; and when these are few and familiar, the words that express them must be simple. As no author equals Shakespeare in boldness or variety of figures, when he copies the style of those violent passions that stimulate the fancy; so, when he would exhibit the human mind in a dejected state, no uninspired writer excels him in simplicity. The same Lear whose resentment had impaired his understanding, while it broke out in the most boisterous language, when, after some medical applications, he recovers his reason, his rage being now exhausted, his pride humbled, and his spirits totally depressed, speaks in a style than which nothing can be imagined more simple, or more affecting :

Pray, do not mock me ;

I am a very foolish, fond old man,  
 Fourscore and upward, and, to deal plainly with  
 you,

I fear I am not in my perfect mind.

Methinks I should know you, and know this man,

Yet I am doubtful ; for I am mainly ignorant

What place this is, and all the skill I have

Remembers not these garments ; nor I know not

Where I did lodge laſt night. — \*

— Deſdemona, ever gentle, artleſs, and ſincere, ſhocked at the unkindneſs of her huſband, and overcome with melancholy, ſpeaks in a ſtyle ſo beautifully ſimple, and ſo perfectly natural, that one knows not what to ſay in commendation of it :

My mother had a maid call'd Barbara ;  
 She was in love, and he ſhe loved proved mad,  
 And did forſake her. She had a ſong of willow ;  
 An old thing it was, but it expreſs'd her fortune,  
 And ſhe died ſinging it. That ſong to-night  
 Will not go from my mind ; I have much to do,  
 But to go hang my head all at one ſide,  
 And ſing it like poor Barbara †.

Sometimes

\* King Lear, act 4. ſcene 7.

† Othello, act 4. ſcene 3. This charming paſſage, tranſlated into the *ſinical ſtyle*, which, whatever be the ſubject or ſpeaker, muſt always be deſcriptive, enigmatical, and full of figures, would perhaps run thus :

Even now, ſad Memory to my thought recalls  
 The nymph Dione, who, with pious care,  
 My much-loved mother, in my vernal years,  
 Attended : blooming was the maiden's form,  
 And on her brow Diſcretion ſat, and on  
 Her roſy cheek a thouſand Graces play'd.  
 O luckleſs was the day, when Cupid's dart,  
 Shot from a gentle ſwain's alluring eye,  
 Firſt thrill'd with pleaſing pangs her throbbing breaſt !  
 That gentle ſwain, ah ! gentle now no more,  
 (Horrid to tell !), by ſudden phrenſy driven,

Ran

Sometimes the imagination, even when exerted to the utmost, takes in but few ideas. This happens when the attention is totally engrossed by some very great object; admiration being one of those emotions that rather suspend the exercise of the faculties, than push them into action. And here too the simplest language is the most natural; as when Milton says of the Deity, that he sits “high-throned above all height.” And as this simplicity is more suitable to that one great exertion which occupies the speaker’s mind, than a more elaborate imagery or lan-

Ran howling to the wild : blood-tinctured fire  
 Glared from his haggard eyeballs, and on high  
 The hand of Horror raised his ragged hair,  
 And cold sweat bathed his agonizing frame.  
 What didst thou then, Dione ! ill-star’d maid !  
 What couldst thou do ! — From morn to dewy eve,  
 From Eve till rosy-finger’d Morn appear’d,  
 In a sad song, a song of ancient days,  
 Warbling her wild woe to the pitying winds,  
 She sat ; the weeping willow was her theme,  
 And well the theme accorded with her woe ;  
 Till Fate suppress’d at length th’ unfinish’d lay.  
 Thus on Meander’s flowery mantled side  
 The dying cygnet sings, and singing dies.

I hope my young readers are all wiser ; but I believe there was a time, when I should have been tempted to prefer this flashy tinsel to Shakespear’s find gold. I do not say, that in themselves these lines are all bad, though several of them are ; and in some sorts of composition the greater part might perhaps be pardonable ; but I say, that, considered in relation to the character and circumstances of Desdemona, they are all unnatural, and therefore not poetical.

guage would have been; so has it also a more powerful effect in fixing and elevating the imagination of the hearer: for, to introduce other thoughts for the sake of illustrating what cannot be illustrated, could answer no other purpose, than to draw off the attention from the principal idea. In these and the like cases, the fancy left to itself will have more satisfaction in pursuing at leisure its own speculations, than in attending to those of others; as they who see for the first time some admirable object, would chuse rather to feast upon it in silence, than to have their thoughts interrupted by a long description from another person, informing them of nothing but what they see before them, are already acquainted with, or may easily conceive.—On these principles, I cannot but think, that Milton's elaborate account of the creation of light \*, excellent as it is in many particulars, is yet far less striking to the mind, than that famous passage of Moses, so justly admired by Longinus for its sublimity, "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light." When I contemplate the idea suggested by

\* Let there be light, God said; and forthwith light  
 Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure,  
 Sprung from the deep, and from her native east  
 To journey through the aery gloom began,  
 Sphered in a radiant cloud; for yet the sun  
 Was not; she in a cloudy tabernacle  
 Sojourn'd the while. *Parad. Lost*, vii. 244.

these few simple words, I fancy myself encompassed with the darkness of chaos; that I hear the Almighty Word, and at the same instant see light diffused over all the immensity of nature. Here an object, the greatest surely that can be imagined, the whole illuminated universe starts at once into view. And the fancy seems to be assisted not a little by the shortness and simplicity of the phrase, which hint the instantaneousness of the effect, and the facility wherewith the First Cause operates in producing a work so unutterably beautiful, and so astonishingly great.

But to return from this digression, which was only intended to show, that though some thoughts and emotions require a figurative, others as naturally adopt a simple, style: — I remarked, that the *hyperbole*, *prosopeia*, and *apostrophe*, are among the most passionate figures. This deserves illustration.

1. A very angry man is apt to think the injury he has just received greater than it really is; and, if he proceed immediately to retaliate by word or deed, seldom fails to exceed the due bounds, and to become injurious in his turn. The fond parent looks upon his child as a prodigy of genius and beauty; and the romantic lover will not be persuaded that his mistress has nothing supernatural either in her mind or person. Fear, in like manner, not only magnifies its object when real, but even forms an object out of nothing, and mistakes the fictions of  
fancy

fancy for the intimations of sense. — No wonder then, that they who speak according to the impulse of passion should speak *hyperbolically*: that the angry man should exaggerate the injury he has received, and the vengeance he is going to inflict; that the sorrowful should magnify what they have lost, and the joyful what they have obtained; that the lover should speak extravagantly of the beauty of his mistress, the coward of the dangers he has encountered, and the credulous clown of the miracles performed by the juggler. In fact, these people would not do justice to what they feel, if they did not say more than the truth. The valiant man, on the other hand, as naturally adopts the diminishing hyberbole, when he speaks of danger; and the man of sense, when he is obliged to mention his own virtue or ability; because it appears to him, or he is willing to consider it, as less than the truth, or at best as inconsiderable. Contempt uses the same figure; and therefore, Petruchio, affecting that passion, affects also the language of it:

Thou liest, thou thread, thou thimble,  
 Thou yard, three quarters, half yard, quarter, nail,  
 Thou flea, thou nit, thou winter-cricket, thou!  
 Braved in mine own house with a skein of thread!  
 Away, thou rag, thou quantity, thou remnant\*!

For some passions consider their objects as

\* Taming of the Shrew, act 4. scene 1.

important, and others as unimportant. Of the former sort are anger, love, fear, admiration, joy, sorrow, pride; of the latter are contempt and courage. Those may be said to subdue the mind to the object; and these, to subdue the object to the mind. And the former, when violent, always magnify their objects; whence the hyperbole called Amplification, or *Auxesis*; and the latter as constantly diminish theirs; and give rise to the hyperbole called *Meiosis*, or Diminution. — Even when the mind cannot be said to be under the influence of any violent passion, we naturally employ the same figure, when we would impress another very strongly with any idea. He is a walking shadow; he is worn to skin and bone; he has one foot in the grave, and the other following; — these and the like phrases are proved to be natural by their frequency. — By introducing great ideas, the hyperbole is further useful in poetry, as a source of the sublime; but, when employed injudiciously, is very apt to become ridiculous. Cowley makes Goliath as big as the hill down which he was marching\*; and tells us, that when he came into the valley, he seemed to fill it, and to overtop the neighbouring mountains, (which, by the by, seems rather to lessen the mountains and vallies, than to magnify

\* Davideis, book 3.

the giant); nay, he adds, that the fun started back when he saw the splendor of his arms. This poet seems to have thought, that the figure in question could never be sufficiently enormous; but Quintilian would have taught him, “*Quamvis omnis hyperbole ultra fidem, non tamen esse debet ultra modum.*” The reason is, that this figure, when excessive, betokens, rather absolute infatuation, than intense emotion; and resembles the efforts of a ranting tragedian, or the ravings of an enthusiastic declaimer, who, by putting on the gestures and looks of a lunatic, satisfy the discerning part of their audience, that, instead of feeling strongly, they have no rational feelings at all. In the wildest energies of nature there is a modesty, which the imitative artist will be careful never to overstep.

2. That figure, by which things are spoken of as if they were persons, is called *Prosopopeia*, or Personification. It is a bold figure, and yet is often natural. Long acquaintance recommends to some share in our affection even things inanimate, as a house, a tree, a rock, a mountain, a country; and were we to leave such a thing, without hope of return, we should be inclined to address it with a farewell, as if it were a perceptive creature. Nay, we find that ignorant nations have actually worshipped such things, or considered them as the haunt of certain powerful beings. Dryads and Hamadryads

were



were by the Greeks and Romans supposed to preside over trees and groves; river-gods and nymphs over streams and fountains; little deities, called *Lares* and *Penates*, were believed to be the guardians of hearths and houses. In Scotland there is hardly a hill remarkable for the beauty of its shape, that was not in former times thought to be the habitation of fairies. Nay modern as well as ancient superstition has appropriated the waters to a peculiar sort of demon or goblin, and peopled the very regions of death, the tombs and charnel-houses, with multitudes of ghosts and phantoms.—Besides, when things inanimate make a strong impression upon us, whether agreeable or otherwise, we are apt to address them in terms of affection or dislike. The sailor blesses the plank that brought him ashore from the shipwreck; and the passionate man, and sometimes even the philosopher, will say bitter words to the stumbling-block that gave him a fall.—Moreover, a man agitated with any interesting passion, especially of long continuance, is apt to fancy that all nature sympathises with him. If he has lost a beloved friend, he thinks the sun less bright than at other times; and in the sighing of the winds and groves, in the lowings of the herd, and in the murmurs of the stream, he seems to hear the voice of lamentation. But when joy or hope predominate, the whole world assumes a gay appearance. In the contempla-

tion of every part of nature, of every condition of mankind, of every form of human society, the benevolent and the pious man, the morose and the chearful, the miser and the misanthrope, finds occasion to indulge his favourite passion, and sees, or thinks he sees, his own temper reflected back in the actions, sympathies, and tendencies of other things and persons. Our affections are indeed the medium through which we may be said to survey ourselves, and every thing else; and whatever be our inward frame, we are apt to perceive a wonderful congeniality in the world without us. And hence, the fancy, when roused by real emotions, or by the pathos of composition, is easily reconciled to those figures of speech that ascribe sympathy, perception, and the other attributes of animal life, to things inanimate, or even to notions merely intellectual. — Motion, too, bears a close affinity to action, and affects our imagination nearly in the same manner; and we see a great part of nature in motion; and by their sensible effects are led to contemplate energies innumerable. These conduct the rational mind to the Great First Cause; and these, in times of ignorance, disposed the vulgar to believe in a variety of subordinate agents employed in producing those appearances that could not otherwise be accounted for. Hence an endless train of fabulous deities, and of witches, demons, fairies, genii;

genii; which, if they prove our reason weak and our fancy strong, prove also, that Personification is natural to the human mind; and that a right use of this figure may have a powerful effect, in fabulous writing especially, to engage our sympathy in behalf of things as well as persons, for nothing (as was before observed) can give lasting delight to a moral being, but that which awakens sympathy, and touches the heart: and tho' it be true, that we sympathise in some degree even with inanimate things, yet what has, or is supposed to have, life, calls forth a more sincere and more permanent fellow-feeling — Let it be observed further, that to awaken our sympathetic feelings, a lively conception of their object is necessary. This indeed is true of almost all our emotions; their keenness is in proportion to the vivacity of the perceptions that excite them. Distress that we see is more affecting than what we only hear of \*; a perusal of the gayest scenes in a comedy does not rouse the mind so effectually, as the presence of a chearful companion; and the death of a friend is of greater energy in producing seriousness, and the consideration of our latter end, than all the pathos of Young. Of descriptions addressed to the fancy, those that are most vivid and picturesque will generally be found to have the most powerful influence over our affec-

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 180.

tions \* ; and those that exhibit persons engaged in action, and adorned with visible *insignia*, give a brisker impulse to the faculties, than such as convey intellectual ideas only, or images taken from still life. No abstract notion of Time, or of Love, can be so striking to the fancy, as the image of an old man accoutered with a scythe, or of a beautiful boy with wings and a bow and arrows: and no physiological account of Frenzy could suggest so vivid an idea, as the poet has given us in that exquisite portrait,

And moody Madness laughing wild, amid severest  
woe.

And for this reason partly it is, that the Epic poet, in order to work the more effectually upon our passions and imagination, refers the secret springs of human conduct, and the vicissitudes of human affairs, to the agency of personified causes; that is, to the machinery of gods and goddesses, angels, demons, magicians, and other powerful beings. And hence, in all sublime poetry, life and motion, with their several modes and attributes, are liberally bestowed on those

\* I say *generally*; for it is not always so. Descriptions of very great or terrible objects have sometimes a greater effect upon the mind, when expressed with some degree of obscurity, where "more is meant than meets the ear," than if they had been pictured out in the most lively manner. See part 1. chap. 5. § 4.

objects wherewith the author intends that we should be strongly impressed: scenes perfectly inanimate, and still tending rather to diffuse a languor over the mind, than to communicate to our internal powers those lively energies, without which a being essentially active can never receive complete gratification. — Lastly, some violent passions are peculiarly inclined to change things into persons. The horrors of his mind haunted Orestes in the shape of furies. Conscience in the form of the murdered person, stares the murderer in the face, and often terrifies him to distraction. The superstitious man, travelling alone in the dark, mistakes a white stone for a ghost, a bush for a demon, a tree waving with the wind for an enormous giant brandishing a hundred arms. The lunatic and enthusiast converse with persons who exist only in their own distempered fancy: and the glutton, and the miser, if they were to give utterance to all their thoughts, would often, I dare say, speak, the one of his gold, the other of his belly, not only as a person, but as a god,—the object of his warmest love, and most devout regard. — More need not be said to prove, that Personification is natural, and may frequently contribute to the pathos, energy, and beauty of poetic language.

3. *Apostrophe*, or a sudden diversion of speech from one person to another person or thing, is a figure nearly related to the former,

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mer. Poets sometimes make use of it, in order to help out their verse, or merely to give variety to their style: but on those occasions it is to be considered as rather a trick of art, than an effort of nature. It is most natural, and most pathetic, when the person or thing to whom the apostrophe is made, and for whose sake we give a new direction to our speech, is in our eyes eminently distinguished for good or evil, or raises within us some sudden and powerful emotion, such as the hearer would acquiesce in, or at least acknowledge to be reasonable. But this, like the other pathetic figures, must be used with great prudence. For if, instead of calling forth the hearer's sympathy, it should only betray the levity of the speaker, or such wanderings of his mind as neither the subject nor the occasion would lead one to expect, it will then create disgust, instead of approbation. — The orator, therefore, must not attempt the passionate apostrophe, till the minds of the hearers be prepared to join in it. And every audience is not equally obsequious in this respect. In the forum of ancient Rome that would have passed for sublime and pathetic, which in the most respectable British auditories would appear ridiculous. For our style of public speaking is cool and argumentative, and partakes less of enthusiasm than the Roman did, and much less than the modern French or Italian. Of British eloquence, particular-

ly that of the pulpit, the chief recommendations are gravity and simplicity. And it is vain to say, that our oratory *ought* to be more vehement: for that matter depends on causes, which it is not only inexpedient, but impossible to alter; namely, on the character and spirit of the people, and their rational notions in regard to religion, policy, and literature. The exclamations of Cicero would weigh but little in our parliament; and many of those which we meet with in French sermons would not be more effectual if attempted in our pulpit. To see one of our preachers, who the moment before was a cool reasoner, a temperate speaker, an humble Christian, and an orthodox divine, break out into a sudden apostrophe to the immortal powers, or to the walls of the church, tends to force a smile, rather than a tear, from those among us who reflect, that there is nothing in the subject, and should be nothing in the orator, to warrant such wanderings of fancy, or vehemence of emotion. If he be careful to cultivate a pure style, and a grave and graceful utterance, a British clergyman, who speaks from conviction the plain unaffected words of truth and soberness, of benevolence and piety, will, if I mistake not, convey more pathetic, as well as more permanent, impressions to the heart, and be more useful as a Christian teacher, than if he were to put in practice all the

attitudes of Roscius, and all the tropes and figures of Cicero.

But where the language of passion and enthusiasm is permitted to display itself, whatever raises any strong emotion, whether it be animated or inanimate, absent or present, sensible or intellectual, may give rise to the apostrophe. A man in a distant country, speaking of the place of his birth, might naturally exclaim, "O my dear native land, shall I never see thee more!" Or, when some great misfortune befalls him, "Happy are ye, O my parents, that ye are not alive to see this."—We have a beautiful apostrophe in the third book of the Eneid, where Eneas, who is telling his story to Dido, happening to mention the death of his father, makes a sudden address to him as follows :

—— hic, pelagi tot tempestatibus actus,  
 Heu, genitorem, omnis curæ casusque levamen,  
 Amitto Anchisen ; — hic me, pater optime, fessum  
 Deferis, heu, tantis nequicquam erepte periclis !

This apostrophe has a pleasing effect. It seems to intimate, that the love which the hero bore his father was so great, that when he mentioned him, he forgot every thing else ; and, without minding his company, one of whom was a queen, suddenly addressed himself to that which, though present only in idea, was still a principal object



ject of his affection. An emotion so warm and so reasonable cannot fail to command the sympathy of the reader. — When Michael, in the eleventh book of Paradise Lost, announces to Adam and Eve the necessity of their immediate departure from the garden of Eden, the poet's art in preserving the decorum of the two characters is very remarkable. Pierced to the heart at the thought of leaving that happy place, Eve, in all the violence of ungovernable sorrow, breaks forth into a pathetic apostrophe to Paradise, to the flowers she had reared, and to the nuptial bower she had adorned. Adam makes no address to the walks, the trees, or the flowers of the garden, the loss whereof did not so much afflict him; but, in his reply to the Archangel, expresses, without a figure, his regret for being banished from a place where he had so oft been honoured with a sensible manifestation of the Divine Presence. The use of the apostrophe in the one case, and the omission of it in the other, not only gives a beautiful variety to the style, but also marks that superior elevation and composure of mind, by which the poet had all along distinguished the character of Adam. — One of the finest applications of this figure that is any where to be seen, is in the fourth book of the same Poem; where the author, catching by sympathy the devotion of our first parents, suddenly drops his narrative, and

joins his voice to theirs in adoring the Father of the universe.

Thus at their shady lodge arrived, both stood,  
Both turn'd, and under open sky adored  
The God that made both sky, air, earth, and heaven,  
Which they beheld, the moon's resplendent globe,  
And starry pole : — Thou also mad'st the night,  
Maker Omnipotent, and thou the day,  
Which we in our appointed work employ'd  
Have finish'd. ———

Milton took the hint of this fine contrivance from a well-known passage of Virgil :

Hic juvenum chorus, ille senum ; qui carmine  
laudes  
Herculeas et facta ferant ; ———  
————— ut duros mille labores  
Rege sub Eurytheo, fati Junonis iniquæ  
Pertulerit : — Tu nubigenas, invicte, bimbres  
Hylæum Pholoumque manu ; tu Cresia mactas  
Prodigia. ——— \*

The beauty arising from diversified composition is the same in both, and very great in each. But every reader must *feel*, that the figure is incomparably more affecting to the mind in the imitation, than in the original. So true it is, that the most rational

\* See a similar instance, Tasso Gier. lib. 18. st. 14.

emotions raise the most intense fellow-feeling; and that the apostrophe is then the most emphatical, when it displays those workings of human affection, which are at once ardent, and well-founded.

A full discussion of the present topic would require a methodical and more particular account of the several tropes and figures, their congruity to human emotions, and their effects in composition. But these few remarks will perhaps be thought to prove with sufficient evidence, the utility of figurative expression in making language more *pleasing* and more *natural*. I shall therefore only add, that tropes and figures, particularly the *metaphor*, *similitude*, and *allegory*, are further useful in beautifying language, by suggesting, together with the thoughts essential to the subject, an endless variety of agreeable images, for which there would be no place, if writers were always to confine themselves to the *proper* names of things. And this beauty and variety, judiciously applied, is so far from distracting, that it tends rather to fix, the attention, and captivate the heart of the reader, by giving light, and life, and pathos to the whole composition.

II. The end of Poetry, above all other literary arts, is to please by imitating nature. I have now shown, that by tropes and figures language may be made more natural and more pleasing, than it could be without them. It follows, that tropes and figures  
are

are more necessary to poetry, than to any other mode of writing: — which is the second point proposed to be illustrated in this section.

The same point might be proved from other considerations. Language, as shown already, is then natural, when it is suitable to the supposed condition of the speaker. Figurative language is peculiarly suitable to the supposed condition of the poet; because figures are suggested by the fancy; and the fancy of him who composes poetry is more employed, than that of any other author. Of all historical, philosophical, and theological researches, the object is *real* truth, which is fixed and permanent. The aim of rhetorical declamation (according to Cicero) is *apparent* truth; which, being less determinate, leaves the fancy of the speaker more free, gives greater scope to the inventive powers, and supplies the materials of a more figurative phraseology. But the poet is subject to no restraints, but those of verisimilitude; which is still less determinate than rhetorical truth. He seeks not to convince the judgement of his reader by arguments of either real or apparent cogency; he means only to please and interest him, by an appeal to his sensibility and imagination. His own imagination is therefore continually at work, ranging through the whole of real and probable existence, “glancing from  
“heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,”

in quest of images and ideas suited to the emotions he himself feels, and to the sympathies he would communicate to others. And, consequently, figures of speech, the offspring of excursive fancy, must (if he speak according to what he is supposed to think and feel, that is, according to his supposed condition) tincture the language of the poet more than that of any other composer. So that, if figurative diction be unnatural in geometry, because all wanderings of fancy are unfuitable, and even impossible, to the geometrician, while intent upon his argument; it is, upon the same principle, perfectly natural, and even unavoidable in poetry; because the more a poet attends to his subject, and the better qualified he is to do it justice, the more active will his imagination be, and the more diversified the ideas that present themselves to his mind. — Besides, the true poet addresses himself to the passions and sympathies of mankind; which, till his own be raised, he cannot hope to do with success. And it is the nature of many passions, though not of all, to increase the activity of imagination: and an active imagination naturally vents itself in figurative language; nay, unless restrained by a correct taste, has a tendency to exceed in it; — of which Bishop Taylor, and Lord Verulam, two geniuses different in kind, but of the highest order, are memorable examples.

I said, that “the poet seeks not to convince the judgement of his reader by arguments of either real or apparent cogency.”—I do not mean, that in poetry argument has no place. The most legitimate reasoning, the soundest philosophy, and narratives purely historical, may appear in a poem, and contribute greatly to the honour of the author, and to the importance of his work. All this we have in *Paradise Lost*.—I mean, that what distinguishes *pure* poetry from other writing, is its aptitude, not to sway the judgement by reasoning, but to please the fancy, and move the passions, by a lively imitation of nature. Nor would I exclude poetical embellishment from history, or even from philosophy. Plato’s *Dialogues* and Addison’s *Moral Essays* abound in poetic imagery; and Livy and Tacitus often amuse their readers with poetical description. In like manner, though *Geometry* and *Physics* be different sciences;—though abstract ideas be the subject, and pure demonstration or intuition the evidence, of the former; and though the material universe, and the informations of sense, be the subject and the evidence of the latter;—yet have these sciences been united by the best philosophers, and very happy effects resulted from the union.—In one and the same work, poetry, history, philosophy, and oratory, may doubtless be blended; nay, these arts have all been actually blended in

one and the same work, not by Milton only, but also by Homer, Virgil, Lucan, and Shakespear. Yet still these arts are different; — different in their ends, and principles, and in the faculties of the mind to which they are respectively addressed: and it is easy to perceive, when a writer employs one, and when another.

III. A reason why tropes and figures are more necessary in some sorts of poetry, than in others, it is not difficult to assign. This depends on the condition of the supposed speaker, particularly on the state of his imagination and passions. When the soul pines with sorrow, or languishes in love, it keeps its view more steadily fixed on one or a few ideas, than when it is possessed with enthusiasm, or agitated by jealousy, revenge, indignation, anxiety, or any other turbulent emotion. In the former case it is inactive; in the latter, restless;

— Magno curarum fluctuat æstu,

Atque animum nunc huc celerem, nunc dividit  
illuc,

In partesque rapit varias, perque omnia versat;

and therefore in the one case it will be occupied by few ideas, and in the other by many. The style, therefore, of the amorous or mournful elegy, in order to be imitative of the language of sorrow or desponding love, must be simpler, and less diversified by

figures, than that of the dithyrambic song, or of any other poem in which the speaker is supposed to be greatly agitated.

I have heard the finest Ode in the world blamed for the boldness of its figures, and for what the critic was pleased to call obscurity. He had, I suppose, formed his taste upon Anacreon and Waller, whose Odes are indeed very simple, and would have been very absurd, if they had not been simple. But let us recollect the circumstances of Anacreon, (considered as the speaker of his own poetry), and of Gray's Welsh Bard. The former warbles his lays, reclining on a bed of flowers, dissolved in tranquillity and indolence, while all his faculties seem to be engrossed by one or a few pleasurable objects. The latter, just escaped from the massacre of his brethren, under the complicated agitations of grief, revenge, and despair; and surrounded with the scenery of rocks, mountains, and torrents, stupendous by nature, and now rendered hideous by desolation, imprecates perdition upon the bloody Edward; and, seized with prophetic enthusiasm, foretells in the most alarming strains, and typifies by the most dreadful images, the disasters that were to overtake his family and descendents. If perspicuity and simplicity be natural in the songs of Anacreon, as they certainly are, a figurative style and desultory composition are no less natural in this inimitable performance of Gray. And if  
real



real prophecy must always be so obscure, as not to be fully understood till it is accomplished, because otherwise it would interfere with the free agency of man, that poem which imitates the style of prophecy, must also, if natural, be to a certain degree obscure; not indeed in the images or words, but in the allusions. And it is in the allusions only, not in the words or images, (for these are most emphatical and picturesque), that the poem partakes of obscurity; and even its allusions will hardly seem obscure to those who are acquainted with the history of England. Those critics, therefore, who find fault with this poem, because it is not so simple as the songs of Anacreon, or the love-verses of Shenstone and Waller, may as well blame Shakespeare, because Othello does not speak in the sweet and simple language of Desdemona. Horace has no where attempted a theme of such animation and sublimity, as this of Gray; and yet Horace, like his master Pindar, is often bold in his transitions, and in the style of many of his odes extremely figurative. But this we not only excuse, but applaud, when we consider, that in those odes the assumed character of the speaker is enthusiasm, which in all its operations is somewhat violent, and must therefore give a peculiar vehemence both to thought and to language.

On what principle, then, it may be said, are we to look for simplicity and exact ar-

rangement, in the style of an Epic poem? Why is not the language of the Iliad and Eneid as figurative as that of Pindar? — To this I answer, first, That the assumed character of the Epic poet is calm inspiration, the effects whereof upon the mind must be supposed to be very different from those produced by enthusiasm or prophetic rapture; regularity and composure being as essential to the former, as wildness and vehemence are to the latter: and, secondly, That a very figurative style continued through a long work becomes tiresome; and therefore, that all poems of great length ought to be methodical in the plan, and simple in the execution. Abrupt transition, boldness of figure, and thoughts elevated almost to extravagance, may please in a short poem; as the dainties of a banquet, and the splendour of a triumph, may amuse for a day: but much feasting destroys health, and perpetual glare and tumult stupify the senses; and the high lyric style continued through many pages would fatigue the attention, confound the judgement, and bewilder the fancy.

CHAP.

## C H A P.    II.

## Of the Sound of Poetical Language.

**I**T is folly to prefer sound to sense. Yet the ear, like every other perceptive faculty, is capable of gratification; and therefore to the sound of words some regard is to be had, even in prose. For ill-sounding language can never be agreeable, either to the hearer or to the speaker; and of different modifications of well-sounding language some will be found to be more agreeable than others. It is the business of the poet to make his style as agreeable, and consequently as pleasing to the ear, as the nature of the subject will allow. And to the harmony of language it behoves him, more than any other writer, to attend; as it is more especially his concern to render his work pleasurable. In fact we find, that no poet was ever popular who did not possess the art of harmonious composition.

What I have to say on the subject of Poetical Harmony may be referred to one or other of these heads: Sweetness, Measure, and Imitation.

I. In order to give *sweetness* to language,  
either

either in verse or prose, all words of harsh sound, difficult pronunciation, or unwieldy magnitude, are to be avoided as much as possible, unless when they have in the sound something peculiarly emphatical; and words are to be so placed in respect of one another, as that discordant combinations may not result from their union. But in poetry this is more necessary than in prose; poetical language being understood to be an imitation of natural language improved to that perfection which is consistent with probability. To poetry, therefore, a greater latitude must be allowed than to prose, in expressing, by tropes and figures of pleasing sound, those ideas whereof the proper names are in any respect offensive, either to the ear or to the fancy\*.

II. How far versification or *regular measure* may be essential to this art, has been disputed by critical writers; some holding it to be indispensably necessary, and some not necessary at all. Without recapitulating what has been said by others, I shall only deliver my own opinion, which, if I mistake not, will be found consistent with the principles already established.

First, then, I am of opinion, that to poetry verse is not essential. In a prose work, we may have the fable, the arrangement, and a great deal of the pathos, and language,

\* See part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3. § I. 1. 2.

of poetry; and such a work is certainly a poem, though perhaps not a perfect one. For how absurd would it be to say, that by changing the position only of a word or two in each line, one might divest Homer's Iliad of the poetical character! At this rate, the arts of poetry and versification would be the same; and the rules in Despauter's Grammar, and the moral distichs ascribed to Cato, would be as real poetry as any part of Virgil. In fact, some very ancient poems, when translated into a modern tongue, are far less poetical in verse than in prose; the alterations necessary to adapt them to our numbers being detrimental to their sublime simplicity; of which any person of taste will be sensible, who compares our common prose-version of Job, the Psalms, and Song of Solomon, with the best metrical paraphrase of those books that has yet appeared\*. Nay,

\* Madame Dacier, zealous to vindicate her Homer, seems to carry the encomium on prose-translation rather too far, when she exclaims, "Ouy, je ne crains point de le dire, et je pourrois le prouver, les pöetes traduits en vers cessent d'etre pöetes." — But she is right in what she says a little after: "En fait de traduction, il y a *souvent* dans la prose une précision, une beauté, et une force, dont la pöésie ne peut approcher. Les livres des Prophetes, et les Pseaumes, dans la vulgate meme, sont pleins de passages, que le plus grand pöete du monde ne sçauroit rendre en vers, sans leur faire perdre de leur majesté, et de leur énergie."

*Préface a l' Iliade de Mad. Dacier, p. 39.*

in many cases, Comedy will be more poetical, because more pleasing and natural, in prose, than in verse. By versifying Tom Jones and The Merry Wives of Windsor, we should spoil the two finest Comic poems; the one Epic, the other Dramatical, now in the world.

But, secondly, Though verse be not essential to poetry, it is necessary to the perfection of all poetry that admits of it. Verse is to poetry, what colours are to painting\*. A painter might display great genius, and draw masterly figures with chalk or ink; but if he intend a perfect picture, he must employ in his work as many colours as are seen in the object he imitates. Or, to adopt a beautiful comparison of Demosthenes, quoted by Aristotle †, “Versification is to poetry what bloom is to the human countenance.” A good face is agreeable when the bloom is gone; and good poetry may please without versification; harmonious numbers may set off an indifferent poem, and a fine bloom indifferent features: but, without verse, poetry is incomplete; and

\* Horace seems to hint at the same comparison, when, after specifying the several sorts of verse suitable to Epic, Elegiac, Lyric, and Dramatic Poetry, he adds,

Descriptas servare vices, operumque colores,  
Cur ego, si nequeo ignoroque, Poeta salutor?

*Ar. Poet. vers. 86.*

† Aristot. Rhetor. lib. 3. cap. 4.

beauty is not perfect, unless to sweetness and regularity of feature there be superadded,

The bloom of young desire, and purple light of love.

If numbers are necessary to the perfection of the higher poetry, they are no less so to that of the lower kinds, to Pastoral, Song, and Satire, which have little besides the language and versification to distinguish them from prose; and which some ancient authors are unwilling to admit to the rank of poems; —though I think it too nice a scruple, both because such writings are commonly termed Poetical, and also because there is, even in them, something that may not improperly be considered as an imitation of nature.

That the rhythm and measures of verse are naturally agreeable; and therefore, that by these poetry may be made more pleasing than it would be without them, is evident from this, that children and illiterate people, whose admiration we cannot suppose to be the effect of habit or prejudice, are exceedingly delighted with them. In many proverbial sayings, where there is neither rhyme nor alliteration\*, rhythm is obviously studied. Nay, the use of rhythm in poetry is univer-

\* See Essay on Laughter, chap. 2. sect. 3.

fal; whereas alliteration and rhyme, though relifhed by fome nations, are not much fought after by others. And we need not be at a lofs to account for the agreeablenefs of proportion and order, if we reflect, that they fuggelt the agreeable ideas of contrivance and fkill, at the fame time that they render the connection of things obvious to the understanding, and imprint it deeply on the memory\*. Verfe, by promoting diftinct and eafy remembrance, conveys ideas to the mind with energy, and enlivens every emotion the poet intends to raife in the reader or hearer. Befides, when we attend to verfes, after hearing one or two, we become acquainted with the meafure, which therefore we always look for in the fequel. This perpetual interchange of hope and gratification is a fource of delight; and to this in part is owing the pleafure we take in the rhimes of modern poetry. And hence we fee, that though an incorreét rhyme, or untunable verfe, be in itfelf, and compared with an important fentiment, a very trifling matter; yet it is no trifle in regard to its effects on the hearer; becaufe it brings difappointment, and fo gives a temporary fhock to the mind, and interrupts the current of the affections; and becaufe it fuggelts the difagreeable ideas of negligence or want of

\* On the effects of Rhythm in mufic; fee above, part 1. chap. 6. feét. 2. § 4.



skill on the part of the author. And therefore, as the public ear becomes more delicate, the negligence will be more glaring, and the disappointment more intensely felt; and correctness of rhyme and of measure will of course be the more indispensable. In our tongue, rhyme is more necessary to Lyric, than to Heroic poetry. The reason seems to be, that in the latter the ear can of itself perceive the boundary of the measure; because the lines are all of equal length nearly, and every good reader makes a short pause at the end of each; whereas, in the former, the lines vary in length; and therefore the rhyme is requisite to make the measure and rhythm sufficiently perceptible. Custom too may have some influence. English Odes without rhyme are uncommon; and therefore have something awkward about them, or something at least to which the public ear is not yet thoroughly reconciled.

Moreover, in poetry, as in music, Rhythm is the source of much pleasing variety; of variety tempered with uniformity, and regulated by art: inasmuch, that, notwithstanding the likeness of one hexameter verse to another, it is not common, either in Virgil or in Homer, to meet with two contiguous hexameters, whose rhythm is exactly the same. And though all English heroic verses consist of five feet, among which the Iambic predominates; yet this measure, in

respect of rhythm alone, is susceptible of more than thirty varieties. And let it be remarked further, that different kinds of verse, by being adapted to different subjects and modes of writing, give variety to the poetic language, and multiply the charms of this pleasing art.

What has formerly been shown to be true in regard to style, will also in many cases hold true of versification, "that it is then "*natural*, when it is adapted to the *supposed* "*condition* of the speaker."—In the Epopee, the poet assumes the character of calm inspiration; and therefore his language must be elevated, and his numbers majestic and uniform. A peasant speaking in heroic or hexameter verse is no improbability here; because his words are supposed to be transmitted by one who will of his own accord give them every ornament necessary to reduce them into dignified measure; as an eloquent man, in a solemn assembly, recapitulating the speech of a clown, would naturally express it in pure and perspicuous language. The uniform heroic measure will suit any subject of dignity, whether narrative or didactic, that admits or requires uniformity of style.—In Tragedy, where the imitation of real life is more perfect than in Epic poetry, the uniform magnificence of Epic numbers might be improper; because the heroes and heroines are supposed to speak in their own persons, and according to the  
immediate

immediate impulse of passion and sentiment. Yet even in Tragedy, the versification may be both harmonious and dignified; because the characters are taken chiefly from high life, and the events from a remote period; and because the higher poetry is permitted to imitate nature, not as it is, but in that state of perfection, in which it might be. The Greeks and Romans considered their hexameter as too artificial for Dramatic poetry, and therefore in tragedy, and even in comedy, made use of the Iambic, and some other measures that came near the cadence of conversation: we use the Iambic both in the epic and dramatic poem; but, for the most part, it is, or ought to be, much more elaborate in the former, than in the latter.—In Dramatic Comedy, where the manners and concerns of familiar life are exhibited, Verse would seem to be unnatural, except it be so like the sound of common discourse, as to be hardly distinguishable from it. Custom, however, may in some countries determine otherwise; and against custom, in these matters, it is vain to argue.—The professed enthusiasm of the dithyrambic poet renders wildness, variety, and a sonorous harmony of numbers peculiarly suitable to his odes. The love-sonnet, and Anacreontic song, will be less various, more regular, and of a softer harmony; because the state of mind expressed in it has more composure.—Philosophy can  
scarcely

scarce go further in this investigation, without deviating into whim and hypothesis. The particular sorts of verse, to be adopted in the lower species of poetry, are determined by fashion chiefly, and the practice of approved authors.

III. The origin and principles of imitative harmony, or of that artifice by which the sound is made, as Pope says, "an echo to the sense," may be explained in the following manner.

It is pleasing to observe the uniformity of nature in all her operations. Between moral and material beauty and harmony, between moral and material deformity and dissonance, there obtains a very striking analogy. The visible and audible expressions of almost every virtuous emotion are agreeable to the eye and the ear, and those of almost every criminal passion disagreeable. The looks, the attitudes, and the vocal sounds, natural to benevolence, to gratitude, to compassion, to piety, are in themselves graceful and pleasing; while anger, discontent, despair, and cruelty bring discord to the voice, deformity to the features, and distortion to the limbs. That flowing curve, which painters know to be essential to the beauty of animal shape, gives place to a multiplicity of right lines and sharp angles in the countenance and gesture of him who knits his brows, stretches his nostrils, grinds his teeth, and clenches his fist; whereas devotion,

mag-

magnanimity, benevolence, contentment, and good-humour, soften the attitude, and give a more graceful swell to the outline of every feature. Certain vocal tones accompany certain mental emotions. The voice of sorrow is feeble and broken, that of despair boisterous and incoherent; joy assumes a sweet and sprightly note, fear a weak and tremulous cadence; the tones of love and benevolence are musical and uniform, those of rage loud and dissonant; the voice of the sedate reasoner is equable and grave, but not unpleasant; and he who declaims with energy employs many varieties of modulation suited to the various emotions that predominate in his discourse.

But it is not in the language of passion only, that the human voice varies its tone, or the human face its features. Every striking sentiment, and every interesting idea, has an effect upon it. One would esteem that person no adept in Narrative eloquence, who should describe with the very same accent, swift and slow motion, extreme labour and easy performance, agreeable sensation and excruciating pain; who should talk of the tumult of a tempestuous ocean, the roar of thunder, the devastations of an earthquake, or an Egyptian pyramid tumbling into ruins, in the same tone of voice wherewith he describes the murmur of a rill, the warbling of the harp of Eolus, the swinging of a cradle, or the descent of an  
angel,

angel. Elevation of mind gives dignity to the voice. From Achilles, Sarpedon, and Othello, we should as naturally expect a manly and sonorous accent, as a nervous style and majestic attitude. Coxcombs and bullies, while they assume airs of importance and valour, affect also a dignified articulation.

Since the tones of natural language are so various, Poetry, which imitates the language of nature, must also vary its tones; and, in respect of sound as well as of meaning, be framed after that model of ideal perfection, which the variety and energy of the human articulate voice render probable. This is the more easily accomplished, because, in every language, there is between the sound and sense of certain words a perceptible analogy; which, though not so accurate as to lead a foreigner from the sound to the signification \*, is yet accurate enough

\* There is in Tasso's *Gierusalemme Liberata* a famous stanza, of which Rousseau says, that a good ear and sincere heart are alone sufficient to enable one to judge of it. The imitative harmony and the poetry are indeed admirable; but I doubt whether a person who understands neither Italian nor Latin could even guess at the meaning from the sound. I have attempted it in English, but am sensible of my inability to do it justice.

Chiama gli habitator de l' ombre eterne  
 Il rauco suon de la tartarea tromba :  
 Treman le spaciose atre caverne,  
 Et l'aer cieco a quel rumor rimbomba ;

enough to show, that, in forming such words, regard has been had to the imitative qualities of vocal sound. Such, in English, are the words yell, crash, crack, hiss, roar, murmur, and many others.

All the particular laws that regulate this sort of imitation, as far as they are founded in nature, and liable to the cognizance of philosophy, depend on the general law of style above mentioned. Together with the other circumstances of the supposed speaker, the poet takes into consideration the tone of voice suitable to the ideas that occupy his mind, and thereto adapts the sound of his language, if it can be done consistently with ease and elegance of expression. But when this imitative harmony is too much sought after, or words appear to be chosen for sound rather than sense, the verse becomes finical and ridiculous \*.

## Words

Ne stridendo così da le superne  
Regioni del cielo il folgor piomba ;  
Ne si Scoffa giamai trema la terra,  
Quando i vapori in sen gravida ferra.      *Can. 4. st. 4.*

To call the tribes that roam the Stygian shores,  
The hoarse Tartarean trump in thunder roars ;  
Hell through her trembling caverns starts aghast,  
And Night's black void rebellows to the blast :  
Far less the peal that rends th' ethereal world,  
When bolts of vengeance from on high are hurl'd ;  
Far less the shock that heaves earth's tottering frame,  
When its torn entrails spout th' imprison'd flame.

\* Such is Ronfard's affected imitation of the song of the sky-lark :

Words by their sound may imitate sound ;  
 and quick or slow articulation may imitate  
 quick or slow motion. Hence, by a pro-  
 per choice and arrangement of words, the  
 poet may imitate, *Sounds* that are, Sweet  
 with dignity (*a*),—Sweet and tender (*b*),—  
 Loud

Elle quindée du zephire  
 Sublime en l'air vire et revire,  
 Et y declique un joli cris,  
 Qui rit, guérit, et tire l'ire  
 Des esprits mieux que je n'écris.

This is as ridiculous as that line of Ennius,

Tum tuba terribili fonitu taratantara dixit :

Or as the following verses of Swift ;

The man with the kettle-drum enters the gate,  
 Dub dub a dub dub : the trumpeters follow,  
 'Tantara tantara ; while all the boys hollow.

(*a*) No sooner had th' Almighty ceas'd, than all  
 The multitude of angels, with a shout  
 Loud as from numbers without number, sweet  
 As from blest voices uttering joy ; heaven rung  
 With jubilee, and loud hosannas fill'd  
 The eternal regions. — *Par. Lost, book 3.*

See also the night-storm of thunder, lightening, wind,  
 and rain, in Virg. Georg. lib. 1. vers. 328.—334.

(*b*) Et longum, formose, vale, vale, inquit, Iola.  
*Virg. Ecl. 3.*

Formosam resonare doces Amarillida silvas.  
*Virg. Ecl. 1.*

See



Loud (*c*), — and Harsh (*d*); — and *Motions* that are, Slow in consequence of dignity (*e*), — Slow in consequence of difficulty (*f*), —  
Swift

See also the simile of the nightingale, Geor. lib. 4. vers. 511. And see that wonderful couplet describing the wailings of the owl, *Æneid*. IV. 462.

(*c*)      ————— vibratus ab æthere fulgor  
Cum fonitu venit, et ruere omnia visa repente,  
Tyrrenusque tubæ mugire per æthera clangor;  
Suspiciunt; iterum atque iterum fragor intonat in-  
gens.      *Æneid*. 8.

See also the storm in the first book of the *Æneid*, and in the fifth of the *Odyssæy*; — and the stanza already quoted from Tasso.

(*d*) The hoarse rough verse should like the torrent  
roar.      *Pope*.

————— On a sudden open fly;  
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,  
Th' infernal doors, and on their hinges grate  
Harsh thunder. ————— *Par. Lost*, II. 879.

See also Homer's *Iliad*, lib. 3. vers. 363. and Clarke's annotation.

(*e*) See an exquisite example in Gray's *Progress of Poesy*; the conclusion of the third stanza.

(*f*) And when up ten steep slopes you've drag'd your  
thighs.      *Pope*.

Just brought out this, when scarce his tongue  
could stir.      *Pope*.

————— The huge leviathan  
Wallowing unwieldy, enormous in their gait,  
Tempest the ocean.      *Par. Lost*, VII. 411.

Swift and noisy (*g*),—Swift and smooth (*b*),  
—Uneven and abrupt (*k*),—Quick and  
joyous (*m*). An unexpected pause in the  
verse may also imitate a sudden failure of

See the famous description of Sisyphus rolling the stone,  
Odyss. lib. 11. vers. 592. See Quintil. Inst. Orat. lib. 9.  
cap. 4. § 4. compared with Paradise Lost, book 2.  
vers. 1022.

(*g*) Quadrupedante putrem fonitu quatit ungula car-  
pum. *Æneid.*

Αὐτὰρ ἐπεῖτα πῆδόνδε κυλίνδετο λάας ἀναιδῆς.

*Odyss.* 11.

See also Virg. *Æneid.* lib. 1. vers. 83.—87.

(*b*) See wild as the winds o'er the desert he flies:

*Pope.*

Ille volat, simul arva fuga, simul æquora verrens.

*Virg.*

Ἠϊδῆι τ' ἐπεῖτα πέλει, χαλεπῆ περ ἕσσα. *Hesiod.*

(*k*) Πολλὰ δ' ἀναντα καταντα παρᾶντα τε δοχμῖα τ' ἠλδοῦ.

*Hom.*

The last shriek'd, started up, and shriek'd again.

*Anonym.*

(*m*) Let the merry bells ring round,  
And the jocund rebecks found,  
To many a youth, and many a maid,  
Dancing in the chequer'd shade.

*Milton's Allegre.*

See also Grays Progress of Poesy, Stanza 3.

strength (*n*), or interruption of motion (*o*), or give vivacity to an image or thought, by fixing our attention longer than usual upon the word that precedes it (*p*). — Moreover, when we describe great bulk, it is natural for us to articulate slowly even in common discourse; and therefore a line of poetry that requires a slow pronounciation, or seems longer than it should be, may be used with good effect in describing vastness of size (*q*). — Sweet and smooth numbers are

(*n*) Ac velut in somnis oculos ubi languida pressis  
Nocte quies, nequicquam avidos extendere cursus  
Velle videmur : — et in mediis conatibus ægri  
Succidimus. ————— *Æneid.* 12.

See also Virg. Georg. lib. 3. vers. 515. 516.

(*o*) For this, before to night thou shalt have cramps,  
Side-stiches that shall pen thy breath up. Urchins  
Shall exercise upon thee. ———  
Prospero to Caliban in *the Tempest*.

See Pope's Iliad, XIII. 199.

(*p*) ————— How often from the steep  
Of echoing hill or thicket have we heard  
Celestial voices, to the midnight air,  
Sole, — or responsive to each other's note,  
Singing their great Creator? ———  
*Par. Lost, b. 4.*

And over them triumphant Death his dart  
Shook, ——— but delay'd to strike. *Id.*

See also Hom. Odyss. lib. 9. vers. 290.

(*q*) Thus stretch'd out, huge in length, the arch fiend  
lay. *Par. Lost.*

Monstrum

are most proper, when the poet paints agreeable objects, or gentle energy (*r*); and harsher sounds when he speaks of what is ugly, violent, or disagreeable (*s*). This too is according to the nature of common language; for we generally employ harsher tones

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen  
ademptum. *Virg. Æneid. 3.*

Et magnos membrorum artus, magna ossa, lacertosque  
Exiit, atque ingens media confisit arena.  
*Æneid. 5. vers. 422.*

(*r*) Hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori,  
Hic nemus, hic ipso tecum consumerer ævo.  
*Virg. Ecl. 10.*

The dumb shall sing, the lame his crutch forego,  
And leap, exulting like the bounding roe.  
*Pope's Messiah.*

See Milton's description of the evening, *Par. Lost*, book 4.  
vers. 598.—609.

Ye gentle gales, beneath my body blow,  
And softly lay me on the waves below.  
*Pope's Sappho.*

(*s*) Stridenti stipula miserum disperdere carmen.  
*Virg. Ecl. 3.*

Immo ego Sardois videar tibi amarior herbis,  
Horridior rusco, projecta vilis alga.  
*Virg. Ecl. 7.*

Neu patriæ validas in viscera vertite vires.  
*Virg. Æneid. 6.*

See also Milton's description of the Lazar-house in *Paradise Lost*, book 11. vers. 477.—492.

of voice to express what we dislike, and more melodious notes to describe the objects of love, complacency, or admiration. Harsh numbers however should not be frequent in poetry. For in this art, as in music, concord and melody ought always to predominate. And we find in fact, that good poets can occasionally express themselves somewhat harshly, when the subject requires it, and yet preserve the sweetness and majesty of poetical diction. — Further, the voice of complaint, pity, love, and all the gentler affections is mild and musical, and should therefore be imitated in musical numbers; while despair, defiance, revenge, and turbulent emotions in general, assume an abrupt and sonorous cadence. Dignity of description (*t*), solemn vows (*u*), and all sentiments that proceed from a mind elevated with great ideas (*v*), require a correspondent pomp of language and versification. — Lastly: An irregular or uncommon movement in the verse may sometimes be of use, to make the reader

(*t*) See Virg. Geor. I. 328. and Homer, Virgil, and Milton, *passim*. See also Dryden's Alexander's Feast, and Gray's Odes.

(*u*) See Virg. Æneid. IV. 24.

(*v*) Examples are frequent in the great authors. See Othello's exclamation:

————— O now for ever  
Farewell the tranquil mind! &c. *Act. 3. scene 3.*

conceive

conceive an image in a particular manner. Virgil describing horses running over rocky heights at full speed, begins the line with two dactyls, to imitate rapidity, and concludes it with eight long syllables ( $\tau$ ); which is a very unusual measure, but seems well adapted to the thing expressed, namely, to the descent of the animal from the hills to the low ground. At any rate, this extraordinary change of the rhythm, may be allowed to bear some resemblance to the animal's change of motion, as it would be felt by a rider, and as we may suppose it is felt by the animal itself.

Other forms of imitative harmony, and many other examples, besides those referred to in the margin, will readily occur to all who are conversant in the writings of the best versifiers, particularly Homer, Virgil, Milton, Lucretius, Spenser, Dryden, Shakespeare, Pope, and Gray.

I must not conclude without remarking, in justice to the Greek and Latin poets, that, from our ignorance of the ancient pronunciation, we are but incompetently skilled in

( $\tau$ ) Saxa per, et scopulos, et depressas convalles,  
*Geor.* III. 276. Milton seems to have imitated this movement, when he says,

————— Eternal wrath  
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.

See above, Part. I. chap. 6. sect. 1.

their numbers; and that there may be, and probably are, in Homer and Virgil, many imitative harmonies whereof we are not sensible at all. The *quantity* of Greek and Latin syllables we know well enough; but it is a notorious fact, that in cases innumerable our pronunciation of them is contrary to what we know to be right. Thus, in reading the following line of Horace,

Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetæ,

every body pronounces the first syllable of *volunt* long, and the last short; and yet every body knows, that the first is short, and the last long. All regular hexameters begin with a long syllable; yet how often do the best readers introduce them with a short one!

When we read this line, by which Virgil meant both to describe and to imitate slow motion,

Et sola in sicca secum spatiat<sup>r</sup> arena \*,

we make only five or six of the syllables long; and yet in this line there are no fewer than ten long syllables. Must it not then to a Roman ear have appeared more imitative, than it does to ours?

\* Georg. i. 389.

In each of those admirable hexameters, so descriptive of great size,

Et magnos membrorum artus, magna ossa, lacer-  
tosque.

Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lu-  
men ademptum.

there are eleven long syllables according to the ancient pronunciation, and only six or seven according to the modern. If, then, there be any natural suitableness in the slow rhythm of these lines, (and Virgil certainly thought there was), must not that have been more observable anciently than it is now?

In the English tongue, the foot Spondeus, consisting of two long syllables, is not frequent, there being generally one short syllable, or more, for each long syllable. And as our accented or emphatic syllables are all long, and as we give emphasis to the Greek and Latin syllables in the same way almost as to our own, we seldom preserve in our pronunciation the rhythm of the ancient poetry, and are (I think) most apt to lose it in those verses that abound in the Spondeus. The Dactyl, of one long and two short syllables, is very common in English; and it sometimes happens, though not often, that in pronouncing an hexameter of Dactyls we do preserve the true rhythm tolerably well. Of such an hexameter I take the rhythm to be the same with the following:

Multitudes



Multitudes rush'd all at once on the plain with a thundering uproar.

And according to this rhythm, nearly, we do in fact pronounce the last line of Homer's celebrated description of Sisyphus \*. But this line of Virgil, whose measure and motion are exactly the same, the moderns pronounce differently, at least in the first three feet :

Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum.

Of this other line of Virgil, describing loud found,

Suspiciunt; iterum atque iterum fragor intonat ingens,

the rhythm is still the same, after making the necessary *elisions*; and if the reader pronounce it so, his ear will perhaps inform him, that it is more imitative than he at first imagined.

In the beginning of the Eneid, Eolus, at Juno's desire, sends out his winds to destroy

* ΑΥΤΑΡ Ε·	ΠΕΙΤΑ ΠΕ-	ΔΟΝΔΕ ΚΥ-	ΛΙΝΔΕΙΤΟ	ΛΑΑΣ ΑΝ-	ΑΙΔΗΣ.
Multitudes	rush'd all at	once on the	plain with a	thundering	uproar.
Quadrupede-	dante pu-	trem soni-	tu quatit	ungula	campum.
Suspici-	unt ite-	r'atqu'ite-	rum fragor	intonat	ingens.
—	—	—	—	—	—

Trojan fleet. Neptune rebukes them for invading his dominions without his leave; and is just going to denounce a threatening, or inflict a punishment, when he recollects, that it was proper to calm his waters, before he did any thing else :

Quos ego—sed motos præstat componere fluctus.

The interrupted threat is a dactyl;—the remainder of the line goes off in spondees. By this transition from a quick to a slow rhythm, is it not probable, that the poet intended to imitate the change of Neptune's purpose? But this is lost in our pronunciation, though in the ancient I believe it must have been observable.—One instance more, and I quit the subject.

When Dido, that fatal morning on which she put a period to her life, saw that Eneas and his Trojans were actually gone, she at first broke forth into frantic denunciations of revenge and ruin; but soon checks herself, as if exhausted by her passion, when she reflects, that her ravings were all in vain. “Unhappy Dido! (says she), thy evil destiny is now come upon thee\*.” This

\* Infelix Dido! nunc te fata impia tangunt. *Æneid*, iv. 596.—If we read *facta impia*, with the Medicean Manuscript, the Rhythm is still the same, and the sense not materially different: “Unhappy Dido! now are the consequences of thy broken vows come upon thee.”

change of her mind from tempest to a momentary calm (for she immediately relapses into vengeance and distraction) is finely imitated in the poet's numbers. The words I have translated form a line of Spondees, whose slow and soft motion is a striking contrast to the abrupt and sonorous rapidity of the preceding and following verses. This beauty, too, is in a great measure lost in our pronunciation; for we only give five or six long syllables to a line which really contains eleven.—Are these remarks too refined? Those readers will hardly think so, who have studied Virgil's versification; which is artful and apposite to a degree that was never equalled or attempted by any other poet.

In the course of these observations on the *sound* of Poetical Language, I am not conscious of having affirmed any thing which does not admit of proof. Some of the proofs, however, I was obliged to leave out; as they would have led me into long disquisitions, relating rather to the peculiarities of Latin and English verse, than to the general characters of the Poetic Art. These proofs may possibly find a place hereafter in *A Treatise of versification and English prosody*, which I began some years ago, but have not yet finished.

T H E      E N D.

The following is a list of the members of the American Medical Association for the year 1914. The list is arranged in alphabetical order by state and territory. The names are given in full, including the name of the state or territory in which they reside. The list is divided into sections for each state and territory, and the names are listed in the order in which they were received by the Association. The list is a valuable record of the medical profession in the United States at that time.



A N

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L A U G H T E R

A N D

LUDICROUS COMPOSITION.





A N  
E S S A Y

O N

L A U G H T E R

A N D

LUDICROUS COMPOSITION.

Written in the year 1764.

*Ego vero omni de re facetius puto posse ab homine non inurbano, quam de ipsis facetiis, disputari.*  
Cicero.

C H A P. I.

Introduction. The Subject proposed.  
Opinions of Philosophers, — I. Aristotle — II. Hobbes — III. Hutcheson — IV. Akenfide.

**O**F Man, it is observed by Homer, that he is the most wretched, and, by Addison and others, that he is the merriest animal in the whole creation: and both opinions are plausible,  
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and both perhaps may be true. If, from the acuteness and delicacy of his perceptive powers, from his remembrance of the past, and his anticipation of what is to come, from his restless and creative fancy, and from the various sensibilities of his moral nature, Man be exposed to many evils, both imaginary and real, from which the brutes are exempted, he does also from the same sources derive innumerable delights, that are far beyond the reach of every other animal. That our pre-eminence in pleasure should thus, in some degree, be counterbalanced by our pre-eminence in pain, was necessary to exercise our virtue, and wean our hearts from sublunary enjoyment; and that beings thus beset with a multitude of sorrows should be supplied from so many quarters with the means of comfort, is suitable to that benign economy which characterises every operation of nature.

When a brute has gratified those few appetites that minister to the support of the species, and of the individual, he may be said to have attained the summit of happiness, above which a thousand years of prosperity could not raise him a single step. But for Man, her favourite child, Nature has made a more liberal provision. He, if he have only guarded against the necessities of life, and indulged the animal part of his constitution, has experienced but little of that felicity whereof he is capable. - To say nothing



nothing at present of his moral and religious gratifications, is he not furnished with faculties that fit him for receiving pleasure from almost every part of the visible universe? Even to those persons, whose powers of observation are confined within a narrow circle, the exercise of the necessary arts may open inexhaustible sources of amusement, to alleviate the cares of a solitary and laborious life. Men of more enlarged understanding, and more cultivated taste, are still more plentifully supplied with the means of innocent delight. For such, either from acquired habit, or from innate propensity, is the soul of man, that there is hardly any thing in art or nature from which we may not derive gratification. What is great, overpowers with pleasing astonishment; what is little, may charm by its nicety of proportion, or beauty of colour; what is diversified, pleases by supplying a series of novelties; what is uniform, by leading us to reflect on the skill displayed in the arrangement of its parts; order and connection gratify our sense of propriety; and certain forms of *irregularity* and *unsuitableness* raise within us that agreeable emotion whereof LAUGHTER is the outward sign.

RISIBILITY, considered as one of the characters that distinguish man from the inferior animals, and as an instrument of harmless, and even of profitable recreation, to every age, condition, and capacity, of

human creatures, must be allowed to be not unworthy of the philosopher's notice. Whatever is peculiar to rational nature, must be an object of some importance to a rational being; and Milton has observed, that

Smiles from reason flow,  
To brute denied : —

— Whatever may be employed as a means of discountenancing vice, folly, or falsehood, is an object of importance to a moral being; and Horace has remarked,

Ridiculum acri  
Fortius et melius magnas plerumque fecat res \*.

Let this apology suffice at present for my choice of a subject. Even this apology might have been spared: for nothing is below the attention of philosophy, which the Author of Nature has been pleased to establish.

In tracing out the cause of Laughter, I mean rather to illustrate than to confute the opinions of those who have already written on the same subject. The investigation has been several times attempted; nor is the cause altogether unknown. Yet, notwithstanding

\* ——— Ridicule shall frequently prevail,  
And cut the knot when graver reasons fail.

*Francis.*

former

former discoveries, the following Essay may perhaps be found to contain something new; to throw light on certain points of criticism that have not been much attended to; and even to have some merit (if I execute my purpose) as a familiar example of philosophical induction carried on with a strict regard to fact, and without any previous bias in favour of any theory.

To provoke Laughter, is not essential either to Wit or to Humour. For though that unexpected discovery of resemblance between ideas supposed dissimilar, which is called *Wit*, and that comic exhibition of singular characters, sentiments, and imagery, which is denominated *Humour*, do frequently raise laughter, they do not raise it always. Addison's Poem to Sir Godfrey Kneller, in which the British kings are likened to heathen gods, is exquisitely witty, and yet not laughable. Pope's Essay on Man abounds in serious wit; and examples of serious humour are not uncommon in Fielding's History of Parson Adams, and in Addison's Account of Sir Roger de Coverly. Wit, when the subject is grave, and the allusion sublime, raises admiration instead of laughter: and if the comic singularities of a good man appear in circumstances of real distress, the imitation of those singularities, in the Epic or Dramatic Comedy, will form a species of humour, which, if it should force a smile, will draw forth a tear at the same time. An inquiry,

quiry, therefore, into the distinguishing characters of Wit and Humour, has no necessary connection with the present subject. I did, however, once intend to have touched upon them in the conclusion of this Discourse : but Dr Campbell's masterly disquisition concerning that matter, in the first part of his *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, makes it improper for me to attempt it. I was favoured with a perusal of that work in manuscript, when I had finished the three first chapters of this Essay for the press ; and was agreeably surprised to find my notions, in regard to the cause or object of Laughter, so fully warranted by those of my very learned and ingenious friend. And it may not perhaps be improper to inform the public, that neither did he know of my having undertaken this argument, nor I of his having discussed that subject, till we came mutually to exchange our papers, for the purpose of knowing one another's sentiments in regard to what we had written.

Some authors have treated of Ridicule, without marking the distinction between *Ridiculous* and *Ludicrous* ideas. But I presume the natural order of proceeding in this Inquiry, is to begin with ascertaining the nature of what is *purely Ludicrous*. Things *ludicrous* and things *ridiculous* have this in common, that both excite laughter ; but the former excite pure laughter, the latter excite laughter mixed with disapprobation or contempt

contempt\*. My design is, to analyse and explain that quality in things or ideas, which makes them provoke *pure Laughter*, and entitles them to the name of *Ludicrous* or *Laughable*.

When certain objects, qualities, or ideas, occur to our senses, memory, or imagination, we smile or laugh at them, and expect that other men should do the same. To smile on certain occasions, is not less *natural*, than to weep at the sight of distress, or cry out when we feel pain.

There are different kinds of Laughter. As a boy, passing by night through a church-yard, sings or whistles in order to conceal his fear even from himself; so there are men, who, by forcing a smile, endeavour sometimes to hide from others, and from themselves too perhaps, their malevolence or envy. Such laughter is unnatural. The sound of it offends the ear; the features distorted by it seem horrible to the eye. A mixture of hypocrisy, malice, and cruel joy, thus displayed on the countenance, is one of the most hateful sights in nature, and transforms the "human face divine" into the visage of a fiend.——Similar to this is the smile of a wicked person pleasing himself with the hope of accomplishing his evil purposes.

\* *Ridiculus proprie dicitur qui in rebus turpibus ridetur.*  
*Festus.*

Milton gives a striking picture of it, in that well-known passage :

He ceas'd ; for both seem'd highly pleas'd, and  
 Death  
 Grin'd horrible a ghastly smile, to hear  
 His famine should be fill'd, and blest'd his maw  
 Destin'd to that good hour. —

But enough of this. Laughter that makes man a fiend or monster, I have no inclination to analyse. My inquiries are confined to “ that species of laughter, which is at once natural and innocent.”

Of this there are two sorts. The laughter occasioned by tickling or gladness is different from that which arises on reading the Tale of a Tub. The former may be called *Animal* Laughter : the latter (if it were lawful to adopt a new word, which has become very common of late) I should term *Sentimental*. — Smiles admit of similar divisions. Not to mention the scornful, the envious, the malevolent smile, I would only remark, that of the innocent and agreeable smile there are two sorts. The one proceeds from the risible emotion, and has a tendency to break out into laughter. The other is the effect of good humour, complacency, and tender affection. This last sort of smile renders a countenance amiable in the highest degree. Homer ascribes it to Venus, in an epithet \*

\* Φιλομειδης.

which Dryden and Pope, after Waller, improperly translate *laughter-loving*; an idea that accords better with the character of a romp or hoyden, than with the goddesses of love and beauty.

Animal laughter admits of various degrees; from the gentle impulse excited in a child by moderate joy, to that terrifying, and even mortal convulsion, which has been known to accompany an unexpected change of fortune. This passion may, as well as joy and sorrow, be communicated by sympathy\*; and I know not, whether the entertainment we receive from the playful tricks of kittens, and other young animals, may not in part be resolved into something like a fellow-feeling of their vivacity.——Animal and Sentimental laughter are frequently blended; but it is easy to distinguish them. The former is often excessive; the latter never, unless heightened by the other. The latter is always pleasing, both in itself and in its cause; the former may be painful in both. But their principal difference is this:—the one always proceeds from a sentiment or emotion, excited in the mind, in consequence of certain objects or ideas being presented to it, of which emotion we may be conscious even when we suppress laughter;—the other arises, not from any sentiment, or perception of ludicrous ideas, but from some

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 101.

bodily feeling, or sudden impulse, on what is called the animal spirits, proceeding, or seeming to proceed, from the operation of causes purely material. — The present inquiry regards that species that is here distinguished by the name of *Sentimental Laughter*.

The pleasing emotion \*, arising from the view of ludicrous ideas, is known to every one by experience, but, being a simple feeling, admits not of definition. It is to be distinguished from the laughter that generally attends it, as sorrow is to be distinguished from tears; for it is often felt in a high degree by those who are remarkable for gravity of countenance. Swift seldom laughed; notwithstanding his uncommon talents in wit and humour, and the extraordinary delight he seems to have had in surveying the ridiculous side of things. Why this agreeable emotion should be accompanied with laughter as its outward sign, or sorrow express itself by tears, or fear by trembling and paleness, I cannot ultimately explain, otherwise than by saying, that such is the appointment of the Author of Nature. — All I mean by this inquiry is, to determine, WHAT IS PECULIAR TO THOSE THINGS WHICH PRO-

\* This emotion I sometimes call the *Risible Emotion*, and sometimes the *Ludicrous Sentiment*; terms that may be sufficiently intelligible, though perhaps they are not according to strict analogy.



VOKE LAUGHTER; — OR, RATHER, WHICH RAISE IN THE MIND THAT PLEASING SENTIMENT OR EMOTION WHEREOF LAUGHTER IS THE EXTERNAL SIGN.

I. Philosophers have differed in their opinions concerning this matter. Aristotle, in the fifth chapter of his Poetics, observes of Comedy, that “it imitates those vices or  
“ meannesses only which partake of the ri-  
“ diculous : — now the Ridiculous (says he)  
“ consists in some fault or turpitude not at-  
“ tended with great pain, and not destruc-  
“ tive.” It is clear, that Aristotle here means to characterise, not laughable qualities in general, (as some have thought), but the objects of Comic Ridicule only; and in this view the definition is just, however it may have been overlooked or despised by Comic writers. Crimes and misfortunes are often in modern plays, and were sometimes in the ancient, held up as objects of public merriment; but if poets had that reverence for nature which they ought to have, they would not shock the common sense of mankind by so absurd a representation. I wish our writers of comedy and romance would in this respect imitate the delicacy of their ancestors, the honest and brave savages of old Germany, of whom the historian says, “Ne-  
“ mo vitia ridet; nec corrumpere et cor-  
“ rumpi seculum vocatur\*.” — The defi-

\* Tacitus, de moribus Germanorum, cap. 19.

inition from Aristotle does not, however, suit the general nature of ludicrous ideas; for it will appear by and by, that men laugh at that in which there is neither fault nor turpitude of any kind.

II. The theory of Mr Hobbes would hardly have deserved notice, if Addison had not spoken of it with approbation in the forty-seventh paper of the *Spectator*. “The passion of laughter (says Mr Hobbes) is nothing else, but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly. For men (continues he) laugh at the follies of themselves past, when they come suddenly to remembrance, except they bring with them any present dishonour.” Addison justly observes, after quoting these words, that “according to this account, when we hear a man laugh excessively, instead of saying, that he is very merry, we ought to tell him, that he is very proud.” It is strange, that the elegant author should be aware of this consequence, and yet admit the theory; for so good a judge of human nature could not be ignorant, that Laughter is not considered as a sign of pride; persons of singular gravity being often suspected of that vice, but great laughers seldom or never. When we see a man attentive to the innocent humours of a merry company, and yet maintain a fixed

ed solemnity of countenance, is it natural for us to think, that he is the humblest, and the only humble person, in the circle?

Another writer in the Spectator, N<sup>o</sup> 249. remarks, in confirmation of this theory, that the *vainest* part of mankind are most addicted to the passion of laughter. Now, how can this be, if the *proudest* part of mankind are also most addicted to it, unless we suppose vanity and pride to be the same thing? But they are certainly different passions. The proud man despises other men, and derives his chief pleasure from the contemplation of his own importance: the vain man stands in need of the applause of others, and cannot be happy without it. Pride is apt to be reserved and fullen; vanity is often affable, and officiously obliging. The proud man is so confident of his merit, and thinks it so obvious to all the world, that he will scarce give himself the trouble to inform you of it: the vain man, to raise your admiration, scruples not to tell you, not only the whole truth, but even a great deal more. In the same person these two passions may, no doubt, be united: but some men are too proud to be vain, and some vain men are too conscious of their own weakness to be proud. Be all this, however, as it will, we have not as yet made any discovery of the cause of laughter; in regard to which, I apprehend that the vain are not more intemperate

perate than other people; and I am sure that the proud are much less so.

The instances brought by Addison, in favour of this theory of Mr Hobbes;—of  
 “ great men formerly keeping in their re-  
 “ tinue a person to laugh at, who was by  
 “ profession a fool;—of Dutchmen being  
 “ diverted with the sign of the gaper;—of  
 “ the mob entertaining themselves with Jack  
 “ Puddings, whose humour lies in commit-  
 “ ting blunders;—and of the amusement  
 “ that some people find in making as many  
 “ April fools as possible \* :” —these instan-  
 ces, I say, may prove the truth of the di-  
 stich, quoted by our author from Dennis,  
 who translates it from Boileau,

Thus one fool lolls his tongue out at another,  
 And shakes his empty noddle at his brother.

—But I cannot see how they should prove, that laughter is owing to pride, or to a sense of our superiority over the ludicrous object. Great men are as merry now when they do not keep professed jesters, as they were formerly when they did. The gaper may be a common sign at Amsterdam, as the Saracen's head is in England, without being the standing jest of the country, or indeed any jest at all. The Jack Pudding is considered, even by the mob, as more rogue than fool;

\* See Spectator, Numb. 47.

and they who attend the stage of the itinerant physician, do for the most part regard both the master and the servant as persons of extraordinary abilities. And as to the wag who amuses himself on the first of April with telling lies, he must be shallow indeed, if he hope by so doing to acquire any superiority over another man, whom he knows to be wiser and better than himself; for on these occasions, the greatness of the joke, and the loudness of the laugh, are, if I rightly remember, in exact proportion to the sagacity of the person imposed on. What our author, in the same paper, says of Butts in conversation, makes rather against his theory than for it. No man, who has any pretensions to good manners, to common understanding, or even to common humanity, will ever think of making a butt of that person who has neither sense nor spirit to defend himself. Sir John Falstaff would not have excelled so much in this character, if he had not equally excelled in warding off and retorting raillery. The truth is, the butt of the company is generally known to be one of the wittiest and best-humoured persons in it; so that the mirth he may diffuse around him cannot be supposed to arise from his apparent inferiority.

If Laughter arose from pride, and that pride from a sudden conception of some present eminency in ourselves, compared with others, or compared with ourselves as we  
were

were formerly; it would follow,—that the wife, the beautiful, the strong, the healthy, and the rich, must giggle away a great part of their lives, because they would every now and then become suddenly sensible of their superiority over the foolish, the homely, the feeble, the sickly, and the poor;—that one would never recollect the transactions of one's childhood, or the absurdity of one's dreams, without merriment;—that in the company of our equals we should always be grave;—and that Sir Isaac Newton must have been the greatest wag of his time.

That the passion of laughter, though not properly the effect of pride, does, however, arise from a conception of some small fault or turpitude, or at least from some fancied inferiority, in the ludicrous object, has been asserted by several writers. One would indeed be apt at first hearing to reply, that we often smile at a witty performance or passage,—such as Butler's allusion to a boiled lobster, in his picture of the morning\*,—when we are so far from conceiving any inferiority or turpitude in the author, that we greatly admire his genius, and with ourselves possessed of that very turn of fancy which produced the drollery in question. —

\* The sun had long since in the lap  
Of Thetis taken out his nap,  
And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn  
From black to red began to turn.

“ But as we may be betrayed into a mo-  
 “ mentary belief, that Garrick is really Abel  
 “ Drugger; so, it is said, we may imagine  
 “ a transient inferiority, either real or as-  
 “ sumed, even in a person whom we ad-  
 “ mire; and that, when we smile at Butler’s  
 “ allusion, we for a moment conceive him  
 “ to have assumed the character of one who  
 “ was incapable to discern the impropriety  
 “ of such an odd union of images.—We  
 “ smile at the logic, wherewith Hudibras  
 “ endeavours to solace himself, when he is  
 “ set in the stocks,

As beards, the nearer that they tend  
 To th’ earth, grow still more reverend;  
 And cannons shoot the higher pitches,  
 The lower you let down their breeches,  
 I’ll make this present abject state  
 Advance me to a greater height.

“ Here, it is said, that the laugh arises from  
 “ our supposing the author to assume for a  
 “ moment the character of one who, from  
 “ his ignorance of the nature of things, and  
 “ of the rules of analogical reasoning, does  
 “ not perceive, that the case he argues *from*  
 “ is totally unlike the case he argues *to*,  
 “ nor, consequently, that the argument is a  
 “ sophism.—If we smile at the ass, in the  
 “ fable, fawning upon his master, in imita-  
 “ tion of the spaniel; or at the frog puffing  
 “ and swelling to stretch himself to the size  
 VOL. II. U u “ of

“ of the ox, it is (we are told) because we  
 “ perceive something singularly defective in  
 “ the passions or sentiments of those animals.  
 “ And a respectable friend, who entertains  
 “ us with a merry story, is said to do so,  
 “ either by assuming a momentary inferiority,  
 “ or by leading our thoughts to some  
 “ thing in which we seem to discern some  
 “ small fault or turpitude.” In proof of  
 this, it is further affirmed, “ That we never  
 “ smile at *fortuitous* combinations of ideas,  
 “ qualities, or events, but at those  
 “ combinations only that seem to require  
 “ the agency of some directing mind:—  
 “ whence it is inferred, that where-ever the  
 “ ludicrous quality appears, a certain mental  
 “ character is supposed to exert itself; and  
 “ that this character must needs imply inferiority,  
 “ because, from our being so often  
 “ tempted to smile by the tricks of buffoons  
 “ and brute animals, it would seem to be  
 “ consistent neither with superiority nor with  
 “ equality.”

This theory is more subtle than solid. Let us look back to the analogical argument which Butler puts in the mouth of his hero, and which every person who has the feelings of a man must allow to be laughable. Why is it so? Because (say they) it leads us to discover some turpitude or deficiency in the author's understanding. Is this deficiency, then, in the hero Hudibras, or in Butler the poet? Is it real, or is it assumed? It matters not  
 which;



which; for, though we knew that an idiot had accidentally written it, or that a wrong-headed enthusiast had seriously spoken it, the reasoning would still be ludicrous. Is then a trifling argument from analogy a laughable object, whether advanced seriously or in jest? If this be the case, it must be owned, that the sentiments of mortal men are strangely perverted in these latter times; for that many a volume of elaborate controversy, instead of disposing the gentle reader to slumber by its darkness and dullness, ought to have "set the table in a roar" by its vain and sophistical analogies.

Further, I deny not, that all performances in wit and humour are connected with a mind, and lead our thoughts to the performer as naturally as any other effect to its cause. But do we not sometimes laugh at fortuitous combinations, in which, as no mental energy is concerned in producing them, there cannot be either fault or turpitude? Could not one imagine a set of people jumbled together by accident, so as to present a laughable group to those who know their characters? If Pope and Colley Cibber had been so squeezed by a croud in the play-house, as to be compelled to sit with their heads contiguous, and the arm of one about the neck of the other, expressing at the same time in their looks a mutual antipathy and reluctance, I believe the sight would have been entertaining enough, especially if

believed to be accidental. — Our coffee-house-politicians were lately betrayed into a simile, by one Papirius Curfor, a wag who read the news-papers quite across the page, without minding the space that distinguishes the columns, and so pretended to light upon some very amusing combinations. These were no doubt the contrivance of Papirius himself; but, supposing them to have been accidental, and that the printer had without design neglected to separate his columns, I ask, whether they would have been less ridiculous? The joke I shall allow to be as wretched as you please: but we are not now talking of the *delicacies* of wit or humour, (which will be touched upon in the sequel), but of those combinations of ideas that provoke laughter. And here let me beg of the critic, not to take offence at the familiarity of these examples. I shall apologize for them afterwards. Meantime he will be pleased to consider, that my subject is a familiar one, and the phenomenon I would account for as frequent among clowns and children as among philosophers.

III. Hutcheson has given another account of the ludicrous quality. He seems to think, that “it is the contrast or opposition of dignity and meanness that occasions laughter.” Granting this to be true, (and how far this is true will appear by and by), I would observe, in the first place, what the ingenious author seems to have been aware of, that

that there may be a mixture of meanness and dignity, where there is nothing ludicrous. A city, considered as a collection of low and lofty houses, is no laughable object. Nor was that personage either ludicrous or ridiculous, whom Pope so justly characterises,

The greatest, wisest, meanest, of mankind.

— But, secondly, cases might be mentioned, of laughter arising from a group of ideas or objects, wherein there is no discernible opposition of meanness and dignity. We are told of the dagger of Hudibras, that

It could scrape trenchers, or chip bread,  
Toast cheese or bacon, though it were  
To bait a mouse-trap, 'twould not care ;  
'Twould make clean shoes, or in the earth  
Set leeks and onions, and so forth.

The humour of the passage cannot arise from the meanness of these offices compared with the dignity of the dagger, nor from any opposition of meanness and dignity in the offices themselves, they being all equally mean ; and must therefore be owing to some other peculiarity in the description. — We laugh, when a droll mimics the solemnity of a grave person ; here dignity and meanness are indeed united : but we laugh also (though not so heartily perhaps) when he mimics the peculiarities

cularities of a fellow as insignificant as himself, and displays no opposition of dignity and meanness. — The levities of Sancho Pança opposed to the solemnity of his master, and compared with his own schemes of preferment, form an entertaining contrast: but some of the vagaries of that renowned squire are truly laughable, even when his preferment and his master are out of the question. — We do not perceive any contrast of meanness and dignity in Mistress Quickly, Sir Toby in *Twelfth Night*, the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, or Autolycus in the *Winter's Tale*; yet they are all ludicrous characters: Dr Harrison in Fielding's *Amelia* is never mean, but always respectable; yet there is a dash of humour in him, which often betrays the reader into a smile. — Men laugh at puns; the wisest and wittiest of our species have laughed at them; Queen Elizabeth, Cicero, and Shakespeare, laughed at them; clowns and children laugh at them; and most men, at one time or other, are inclined to do the same: — but in this sort of low wit, is it an opposition of meanness and dignity that entertains us? Is it not rather a mixture of sameness and diversity, — sameness in the sound, and diversity in the signification?

IV. Akenfide, in the third book of his excellent Poem, treats of Ridicule at considerable length. He gives a detail of ridiculous characters; ignorant pretenders to learning, — boastful soldiers, and lying travellers,  
— hypo-

— hypocritical churchmen, — conceited politicians, — old women that talk of their charms and virtue, — ragged philosophers who rail at riches, — *virtuosi* intent upon trifles, — romantic lovers, — wits wantonly fatirical, — fops that out of vanity affect to be diseased and profligate, — dastards who are ashamed or afraid without reason, — and fools who are ignorant of what they ought to know. These characters may no doubt be set in such a light as to move at once our *laughter* and *contempt*, and are therefore truly *ridiculous*, and fit objects of comic satire: but the author does not distinguish between what is *laughable* in them and what is *contemptible*; so that we have no reason to think, that he meant to specify the qualities peculiar to those things that provoke *pure laughter*. — Having finished the detail of characters, he makes some general remarks on the cause of ridicule; and explains himself more fully in a prose definition illustrated by examples. The definition, or rather description, is in these words. “ That which  
“ makes objects ridiculous, is some ground  
“ of admiration or esteem connected with  
“ other more general circumstances comparatively worthless or deformed; or it is  
“ some circumstance of turpitude or deformity connected with what is in general  
“ excellent or beautiful: the inconsistent  
“ properties existing either in the objects  
“ themselves, or in the apprehension of the  
“ person

“ person to whom they relate ; belonging  
 “ always to the same order or class of be-  
 “ ing ; implying sentiment and design ; and  
 “ exciting no acute or vehement emotion of  
 “ the heart.” — Whatever account we make  
 of this definition, which to those who ac-  
 quiesce in the foregoing reasonings may per-  
 haps appear not quite satisfactory, there is  
 in the poem a passage that deserves particular  
 notice, as it seems to contain a more exact ac-  
 count of the ludicrous quality, than is to be  
 found in any of the theories above mention-  
 ed. This passage will be quoted in the next  
 chapter.

## C H A P. II.

Laughter seems to arise from the  
 view of things incongruous united  
 in the same assemblage ; I. By  
 Juxta-position ; II. As Cause and  
 Effect ; III. By Comparison found-  
 ed on Similitude ; or, IV. Uni-  
 ted so as to exhibit an opposition  
 of Meanness and Dignity.

**H**OWEVER imperfect these Theories may  
 appear, there is none of them destitute  
 2 of

of merit: and indeed the most fanciful philosopher seldom frames a theory, without consulting nature, in some of her more obvious appearances. Laughter very frequently arises from the view of dignity and meanness united in the same object; sometimes, no doubt, from the appearance of assumed inferiority \*, as well as of small faults and unimportant turpitudes; and sometimes, perhaps, though rarely, from that sort of pride, which is described in the passage quoted from Mr Hobbes by Addison.

All these accounts agree in this, that the cause of laughter is something compounded; or something that disposes the mind to form a comparison, by passing from one object or idea to another. That this is in fact the case, cannot be proved *a priori*; but this holds in all the examples hitherto given, and will be found to hold in all that are given hereafter. May it not then be laid down as a principle, that “Laughter  
“ arises from the view of two or more ob-  
“ jects or ideas, disposing the mind to form  
“ a comparison?” According to the theory

\* Pope, Arbuthnot, and Swift, in some of their most humorous pieces, assume the character, and affect the ignorance, of Grubstreet writers; and from this circumstance part of the humour of such papers will perhaps be found to arise. “Valde hæc ridentur (says Cicero) quæ a prudentibus, quasi per dissimulationem non intelligendi, sub absurde falseque dicuntur.” De Orat. II. 68.

of Hobbes, this comparison would be between the ludicrous object and ourselves; according to those writers who misapply Aristotle's definition, it would seem to be formed between the ludicrous object and other things or persons in general; and if we incline to Hucheson's theory, which is the best of the three, we shall think that there is a comparison of the parts of the ludicrous object, first with one another, and secondly with ideas or things extraneous.

Further: Every appearance that is made up of parts, or that leads the mind of the beholder to form a comparison, is not ludicrous. The body of a man or woman, of a horse, a fish, or a bird, is not ludicrous, though it consists of many parts; — and it may be compared to many other things without raising laughter: but the picture described in the beginning of the Epistle to the Pisos, with a man's head, a horse's neck, feathers of different birds, limbs of different beasts, and the tail of a fish, would have been thought ludicrous eighteen hundred years ago, if we believe Horace, and in certain circumstances would no doubt be so at this day. It would seem then, that “the parts of a laughable assemblage must be in some degree unsuitable and heterogeneous.”

Moreover: Any one of the parts of the Horatian monster, a human head, a horse's neck, the tail of a fish, or the plumage of a fowl, is not ludicrous in itself; nor  
would



would those several parts be ludicrous, if attended to in succession, without any view to their union. For to see them disposed on different shelves of a museum, or even on the same shelf, no body would laugh, except perhaps the thought of uniting them were to occur to his fancy, or the passage of Horace to his memory. It seems to follow, “ that  
 “ the incongruous parts of a laughable idea  
 “ or object must either be combined so as to  
 “ form an assemblage, or must be supposed  
 “ to be so combined.”

— May we not then conclude, that “ Laugh-  
 “ ter arises from the view of two or more  
 “ inconsistent, unsuitable, or incongruous  
 “ parts or circumstances, considered as u-  
 “ nited in one complex object or assem-  
 “ blage, or as acquiring a sort of mutual re-  
 “ lation from the peculiar manner in which  
 “ the mind takes notice of them ?” The lines  
 “ from Akenfide, formerly referred to, seem  
 “ to point at the same doctrine :

Where-e'er the power of Ridicule displays  
 Her quaint-eyed visage, *some incongruous form,*  
*Some stubborn dissonance of things combined,*  
 Strikes on the quick observer.

And, to the same purpose, the learned and ingenious Dr Gerard, in his *Essay on Taste* :  
 “ The sense of Ridicule is gratified by an  
 “ inconsistency and dissonance of circum-  
 “ stances in the same object, or in objects

“ nearly related in the main ; or by a similitude or relation unexpected between things on the whole opposite and unlike.”

And therefore, instead of saying with Huchefon, that the cause or object of laughter is an “ opposition of dignity and meanness ;” — I would say, in more general terms, that it is, “ an opposition of suitability and unsuitableness, or of relation and the want of relation, united, or supposed to be united, in the same assemblage.” — Thus the offices ascribed to the dagger of Hudibras seem quite heterogeneous ; but we discover a bond of connection among them, when we are told, that the same weapon could occasionally perform them all. — Thus, even in that mimicry, which displays no opposition of dignity and meanness, we perceive the actions of one man joined to the features and body of another ; that is, a mixture of unsuitableness, or want of relation, arising from the difference of persons, with congruity and similitude, arising from the sameness of the actions. — Thus, at first view, the dawn of the morning, and a boiled lobster, seem utterly incongruous, unlike, and (as Biondello says of Petruchio’s stirrups) “ of no kindred ;” but when a change of colour from black to red is suggested, we recognize a likeness, and consequently a relation, or ground of comparison.

And here let it be observed in general,  
that,

that, the greater the number of incongruities that are blended in the same assemblage, the more ludicrous it will probably be. If, as in the last example, there be an opposition of dignity and meanness, as well as of likeness and dissimilitude, the effect of the contrast will be more powerful, than if only one of these oppositions had appeared in the ludicrous idea. — The sublimity of Don Quixote's mind contrasted and connected with his miserable equipage, forms a very comical exhibition; but when all this is still further connected and contrasted with Sancho Pança, the ridicule is heightened exceedingly. Had the knight of the lions been better mounted and accoutred, he would not have made us smile so often; because, the hero's mind and circumstances being more adequately matched, the whole group would have united fewer inconsistencies, and reconciled fewer incongruities. No particular in this equipment is without its use. The ass of Sancho and the horse of his master; the knight tall and raw-boned, the squire fat and short; the one brave, solemn, generous, learned, and courteous, the other not less remarkable for cowardice, levity, selfishness, ignorance, and rusticity; the one absurdly enamoured of an ideal mistress, the other ridiculously fond of his ass; the one devoted to glory, the other enslaved to his belly: — it is not easy, out of two persons, to make up a more multifarious contrast.

Butler has however combined a still greater variety of uncouth and jarring circumstances in *Ralpho* and *Hudibras*: but the picture, though more elaborate, is less natural. Yet this argues no defect of judgement. His design was, to make his hero not only ludicrous, but contemptible; and therefore he jumbles together, in his equipage and person, a number of mean and disgusting qualities, pedantry, ignorance, nastiness, and extreme deformity. But the knight of *La Mancha*, though a ludicrous, was never intended for a contemptible personage. He often moves our pity, he never forfeits our esteem; and his adventures and sentiments are generally interesting: which could not have been the case, if his story had not been natural, and himself endowed with great as well as good qualities. To have given him such a shape, and such weapons, arguments, boots, and breeches, as Butler has bestowed on his champion, would have destroyed that solemnity, which is so striking a feature in *Don Quixote*: and *Hudibras*, with the manners and person of the Spanish hero, would not have been that paltry figure, which the English poet meant to hold up to the laughter and contempt of his countrymen.—*Sir Launcelot Greaves* is of *Don Quixote's* kindred, but a different character. *Smollet's* design was, not to expose him to ridicule; but rather to recommend him to our pity and admiration. He has therefore given him  
youth,

youth, strength, and beauty, as well as courage, and dignity of mind, has mounted him on a generous steed, and arrayed him in an elegant suit of armour. Yet, that the history might have a comic air, he has been careful to contrast and connect Sir Launcelot with a squire and other associates of very dissimilar tempers and circumstances.

What has been said of the cause of laughter does not amount to an exact description, far less to a logical definition: there being innumerable combinations of congruity and inconsistency, of relation and contrariety, of likeness and dissimilitude, which are not ludicrous at all. If we could ascertain the peculiarities of these, we should be able to characterise with more accuracy the general nature of ludicrous combination. But before we proceed to this, it would be proper to evince, that of the present theory thus much at least is true, that though every incongruous combination is not ludicrous, every ludicrous combination is incongruous.

It is only by a detail of facts or examples, that any theory of this sort can be either established or overthrown. By such a detail, the foregoing theories have been, or may be, shown to be ill-founded, or not sufficiently comprehensive. A single instance of a laughable object, which neither unites, nor is supposed to unite incongruous ideas, would likewise show the insufficiency of the present: nor will I undertake to prove, (for indeed I cannot),

cannot), that no such instance can be given. A complete enumeration of ludicrous objects it would be vain to attempt: and therefore we can never hope to ascertain, beyond the possibility of doubt, that common quality which belongs to all ludicrous ideas that are, or have been, or may be imagined. All that can be done in a case of this kind is to prove, by a variety of examples, that the theory now proposed is more comprehensive, and better founded, than any of the foregoing.

Many are the modes of combination by which incongruous qualities may be presented to the eye, or to the fancy, so as to provoke laughter: and of incongruity itself, of as falsehood, the forms may be diversified without end. An *exact arrangement* of ludicrous examples is therefore as unattainable as a *complete enumeration*. Something, however, of this sort we must attempt, to avoid running into confusion.

I. One of the simplest modes of combination, is that which arises from *Contiguity*. Things incongruous are often laughable, when united as parts of a system, or simply *when placed together*.—— That dialogue of Erasmus, called *Absurda*, which looks like a conversation between two deaf men, seems to be an attempt to raise laughter, by the mere juxtaposition of unconnected sentences. But the attempt is rather unsuccessful; this sort of cross-purposes being too obvious, and too little surprising, to yield entertainment.

1. Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, all admit, that bodily singularities may be laughable \*; and, according to the first of these authors, that is a ridiculous countenance, in which there is deformity and distortion without distress. Any feature, particularly one of the middle features, a nose, a mouth, or a chin, uncommonly large, may, when attended with no inconvenience, tempt one to smile; as appears from the effect of caricatura in painting. We read in the Spectator †, of a number of men with long chins, whom a wag at Bath invited to dine with him; and are told, that a great deal of mirth passed on the occasion. Here was a collection of incongruities related not only by mutual similitude, but also by juxta-position; a circumstance that would naturally heighten the ludicrous effect. Yet here was no mixture of dignity and meanness; and the meeting, if it had been accidental, would not have been less laughable.

2. A country-dance of men and women, like those exhibited by Hogarth in his *Analysis of Beauty*, could hardly fail to make a beholder merry, whether he believed their union to be the effect of design, or of accident. Most of those persons have incongrui-

\* Arist. Poet. § 5.; Cicero de Orat. ii. 239.; Quint. Inst. Or. vi. 3.

† Number 371.

ties of their own, in their shape, dress, or attitude, and all of them are incongruous in respect of one another; thus far the assemblage displays contrariety or want of relation: and they are all united in the same place, and in the same dance; and thus far they are mutually related. And if we suppose the two elegant figures removed, which might be done without lessening the ridicule, we should not easily discern any contrast of dignity and meanness in the group that remains.

3. Almost the same remarks might be made on *The Enraged Musician*, another piece of the same great master, of which a witty author quaintly says, that it *deafens* one to look at it. This extraordinary group forms a very comical mixture of incongruity and relation; — of incongruity, owing to the dissimilar employments and appearances of the several persons, and to the variety and dissonance of their respective noises; — and of relation, owing to their being all united in the same place, and for the same purpose, of tormenting the poor fiddler. From the various sounds co-operating to this one end, the piece becomes more laughable, than if their meeting were conceived to be without any particular destination; for the greater the number of relations, as well as of contrarieties, that take place in any ludicrous assemblage, the more ludicrous it will generally appear. Yet though this group comprehends



prehends not any mixture of meanness and dignity, it would, I think, be allowed to be laughable to a certain degree, merely from the juxta-position of the objects, even though it were supposed to be accidental.

Groups of this sort, if accurately described, are no doubt entertaining, when expressed in words, as well as when presented to the eye by means of colour. But it would require many words to do justice to so great a variety of things and persons; which therefore could not be apprehended by the mind, but gradually and in succession; and hence the jarring coincidences of the whole would be less discernible in a poetical description, than in a print or picture. The ludicrous effect, that arises from the mere *contiguity* of the objects, may therefore be better exemplified by visible assemblages delineated by the painter, than by such as are conveyed to the mind by verbal description\*. Yet even  
by

\* But it does not follow, that Painting is a more copious source of Risible emotion, than those arts are which affect the mind by means of language. Painting is no doubt more lively in description than Poetry: and, by presenting a whole composition to the eye at once, may strike the mind with a more diversified and more emphatical impulse. What we see, too, we apprehend more easily than what we only conceive from narration:

Segnius irritant animos demissa per aurem,  
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus, et quæ  
Ipse sibi tradit spectator.

by this vehicle, burlesque combinations may be suggested to the fancy, which in part derive the ludicrous character from the *juxtaposition* of the component parts. Take an example or two.

4. “ If a man (says the *Tatler*, speaking of the utility of advertisements) has pains in his head, colics in his bowels, or spots in his cloaths, he may there meet with proper cures and remedies. If a man would recover a wife, or a horse that is stolen or strayed; if he wants new sermons, electuaries, or asses milk, or any thing else, either for his body or his mind, this is the place to look for them in \*.”

5. He sung of Taffy Welch, and Sawney Scot,  
Lillibullero, and the Irish trot;  
The bower of Rosamond, and Robin Hood,  
And how the grafs now grows where Troy  
town stood;

But the descriptive powers of painting are subject to many limitations. It cannot mark the progress of action or thought, because it exhibits the events of one instant of time; nor has it any expression for intellectual notions, nor for those calmer affections of the soul that produce no visible change on the body. But Poetry can describe every energy of mind, and phenomenon of matter; and every variety, however minute, of character, sentiment, and passion, as it appears in each period of its progress. And innumerable combinations, both of sublime and of ludicrous ideas there are, which the pencil cannot trace out, but which are easily conveyed to the mind by speech or writing.

\* *Tatler*, Numb. 224.

Then he was seiz'd with a religious qualm,  
And on a sudden fung the hundredth psalm \*.

6. Incongruous ideas, related by contiguity, do sometimes acquire a closer connection, and may become more laughable, when their names being made equally dependent upon one and the same verb, confer on it two or more incongruous significations.

“ It is observable, (says Pope of Prince Eugene), that this general is a great taker of snuff, as well as of towns †.”

An

\* Gay's Pastorals. See *Rape of the Lock*, ii. 105. to 110.

† Key to the Lock. — In all wit of this sort, when laughter is intended, it will perhaps be necessary to blend greatness with littleness, or to form some other glaring contrast. Ovid and Cowley are fond of these quaint conceits, but seldom raise a smile by them, and surely did not intend any.

Confiliis non curribus utere nostris.

*Metamorph. lib. 2.*

And not my chariot, but my counsel take. *Addison.*

But now the early birds began to call

The morning forth : uprose the Sun and Saul.

*Dauids.*

“ A horse (says a certain serious, but flowery author) may throw his rider, and at once dash his body against the stones, and his soul into the other world.”

Such witticism in a serious work is offensive to a reader of taste, (see Hurd's Commentary on the Epistle to Augustus,

An opposition of dignity and meanness, or of greatness and littleness, is no doubt observable in these examples. Yet description may sometimes be laughable, when the ideas or phrases are related by juxta-position only, and imply no perceptible contrast of dignity and meanness. Swift's Inventory of his household-stuff, "An oaken broken elbow-chair, "A caudle-cup without an ear," &c. is truly laughable; at least we are sure that he thought it so: the *various* and *dissimilar* articles specified in it are *similar* and *uniform* in this one respect, that they are all worn out, imperfect, or useless; but their meanness is without any mixture of dignity. — Sancho's Proverbs often provoke a smile; not because some are low and others elevated, but because, though *unconnected* both with the subject and with one another, they happen to be spoken *at the same time*, and absurdly applied to the same purpose. — I have heard that mirth may be promoted amongst idle people by the following expedient. On the top of a page of paper, one of the company writes a line, which he covers with a book; another adds a second, and conceals it in the same manner; and thus the paper goes from hand to hand, till it be full,

gustus, vers. 97.) ; — and we are not apt to laugh at that which offends us. To the author it is probably the object of admiration, and we seldom laugh at what we greatly admire.

no body knowing what the others have written: then the covering is taken off, and the whole read over, as if it were a continued discourse. Here the principal bond of union is juxta-position; and yet, though united by this alone, and though accidentally united, the incongruities may be laughable; though no doubt the joke would be heightened, if there should also happen to be a mixture of meanness and dignity. And the same thing will be found to hold true of those musical contrivances called *medleys*.

7. Even when art is not used to disunite them, human thoughts under no restraint are apt to become ridiculously wild and incongruous. When his mind unbends itself in a reverie, and, without attending to any particular object, permits the ideas to appear and glide away according to the caprice of undirected fancy, the gravest philosopher would be shy of giving permanence to such a jumble by speech or writing\*; lest by its odd incongruities it should raise a laugh at his expence, and show that his thoughts were not quite so regular as he wished the world to believe. We need not then wonder, that, when persons of light minds are made to *think aloud* upon the stage, their rhapsodies should prove so entertaining. Juliet's *Nurse*, and *Mrs Quickly*, are characters of this sort. And we meet with many such

\* See the *Spectator*, Numb. 225.

in real life; whose ravings are laughable, even when they exhibit no mixture of meanness and dignity, and when mere *juxta-position* is the chief bond of union among their ideas.

II. The mind naturally considers as part of the same assemblage, and joins together in one view, those objects that appear in the relation of *cause and effect*. Hence when things, in other respects *unrelated* or *incongruous*, are found or supposed to be *thus related*, they sometimes provoke laughter.

1. “ Really, Madam, (says Filch in the “ *Beggar’s opera*), I fear I shall be cut off “ in the flower of my youth; so that every “ now and then, since I was *pumpt*, I have “ thoughts of taking up and going *to sea*.” — It is the cause of this resolution that makes it ludicrous. One sort of water suggests another to the thief’s fancy; and the fresh-water pump puts him in mind of a similar implement belonging to ships. There is something unexpected, and incongruous, in the thought, and at the same time an appearance of natural connection.

2. There is a sort of Ironical Reasoning, not easily described, which would seem to derive the ludicrous character from a surprising mixture of Plausibility and Absurdity: and which, on account of the real disagreement, though seeming affinity, of the conclusion considered as the *effect*, with the premisses considered as the *cause*, may not  
 2 improperly

improperly be referred to this head; though perhaps, from the real *dissimilitude*, and unexpected appearance of *likeness*, in the circumstances whereon the argument is founded, it might with equal propriety be referred to the following. Several humorous examples of this kind of sophistry may be seen in that excellent English ballad called *The tippling Philosophers*. Hudibras also abounds in it. Such are the lines already quoted, in which he draws comfort from the disaster of being set in the stocks; and such are those well-known passages, that prove morality to be a crime, and Honour to lodge in that part of the human body where it is most liable to be wounded by a kick\*.

3. A cause and effect extremely inadequate to each other form a ludicrous combination. We smile at the child (in *Quarles's Emblems*) attempting to blow out the sun with a pair of bellows. Nor is it much less ridiculous to see heroes, in a tragedy or opera, breathing their last in a long-winded similitude, or musical cadence. The tailor of Laputa, taking measure for a suit of cloaths with a quadrant; the wise men of Lagado carrying vast loads of *things* about with them, that they might converse together without impairing their lungs by the use of speech; and several of the other projects recorded

\* See Hudibras, part 2. canto 3. vers. 1065; and part 3. canto 1. vers. 1290.

in the same admirable satire\*, are ludicrous in the highest degree, from the utter disproportion of the effect to the cause. The same remark may be made upon that part of Sir John Enville's complaint, where he says, (speaking of his lady), "She dictates to me  
 " in my own business, sets me right in point  
 " of trade; and, if I disagree with her about  
 " any of my ships at sea, wonders that I  
 " will dispute with her, when I know very  
 " well that her great-grandfather was a  
 " flag-officer †." — Violent anger occasioned by slight injury makes a man ridiculous; we *despise* his levity, and *laugh* at his absurdity. All excessive passion, when it awakens not sympathy, is apt to provoke laughter; nor do we heartily sympathise with any malevolent, nor indeed with any violent emotions, till we know their cause, or have reason to think them well founded. With such as we have no experience of, we rarely sympathise; and the view of them in others, especially when immoderate, gives rise to merriment. The distress of the miser when his hoard is stolen, and the transport wherewith he receives it back, though the most intense feelings of which he is capable, are more apt to move our laughter, than our sorrow or joy: and in the *Aulularia* of Plautus, a great deal of comic ridicule is found-

\* Gulliver's voyage to Laputa.

† Spectator, Numb. 299.



ed on this circumstance. — Ranting in tragedy is laughable, because we know the cause to be inadequate to the effect; and because a distorted imitation of nature implies a contrast of likeness and dissimilitude: but the opposite fault of insipidity, either in acting or in writing, unless accompanied with something peculiarly absurd, is not laughable; because it does not rouse the attention, and has not that *uncommonness*, which (as will be shown hereafter) generally belongs to ludicrous combination. This difference in the effects of theatrical impropriety is hinted at by Horace:

—— Male si mandata loqueris,  
Aut dormitabo, aut ridebo \*. ——

—Immoderate fear in another, when there seems to be no sufficient cause for it, and when we ourselves are at ease; like that of Sir Hugh Evans, when he is going to fight the French Doctor, is highly ridiculous; both because it is excessive, and because it produces a conflict of discordant passions, and an unconnected effusion of words †.

4. An

\* Ar. Poet. vers. 105.

† “ Pless my soul! how full of cholers I am, and  
“ trempling of mind! I shall be glad if he have de-  
“ ceived me. How melancholies I am? I will knog  
“ his urinals about his knave’s costard, when I have good

4. An emotion that ought to be important venting itself in frivolous language, or insipid behaviour, would no doubt make us smile, if it did not occasion disappointment, or some other powerful feeling subversive of laughter. When Blackmore, in his Paraphrases of Holy Writ, shows, by the meanness of his words and figures, that, instead of having an adequate sense of the dignity of the subject, his mind was wandering after the most paltry conceits; our laughter is prevented by our indignation. Or if ever we are betrayed into a smile by such a couplet as the following,

On thee, O Jacob, I thy jealous God  
Vast heaps of heavy mischief will unload \*,

it must be in some unguarded moment, when, our disgust being less keen than it ought to be, the ludicrous emotion is permitted to operate.

5. Every body knows, that hyperbole is a source of the sublime; and it is equally true, that amplification is a source of humour. But as that which is intrinsically mean can-

“ opportunities for the orke. Pless my soul! *To swallow*  
 “ *rivers, to whose falls Melodious birds sing madrigals;*  
 “ (singing) — *To swallow* — Mercy on me! I have a  
 “ great disposition to cry. *When as I sate in Pabilon,*” &c.  
*Merry Wives of Windsor, act 3. sc. 1.*

\* Blackmore's Song of Moses.

not

not be made great, so neither can real excellence be rendered laughable, by mere amplification. A coxcomb, by exaggerating the charms of a beautiful woman, may make himself ridiculous, but will hardly make them so. But a deformity of feature, that is ludicrous in a low degree, may by exaggeration be made more ludicrous: witness Falstaff's account of Bardolph's fiery-coloured face \*. The following is a Grecian conceit; and so highly valued by Strada, that he takes the trouble to explain it in a copious paraphrase.

In vain to wipe his nose old Proclus tries;  
That mafs his most expansive grasp defies:  
Sneezing he says not, " Bless me;" so remote  
His nostril from his ear, he hears it not. †

Strobilus,

\* First part of King Henry IV. act 3. sc. 3.

† This epigram appears to more advantage in the Greek, on account of the great simplicity of the expression.

Οὐ δύναται τῇ χειρὶ Προκλος τὴν ῥιν' ἀπομυσεῖν,  
Τῆς ῥίνοσ γὰρ ἔχει τὴν χερα μικροτεραν.  
Οὐδε λέγει Ζεῦ σῶσον, ἐὰν πλάρῃ· ἔ γὰρ ἀκουεῖ  
Τῆσ ῥίνοσ, πολυ γὰρ τῆσ ἀκοῆσ ἀπεχει.

See Strada. *Pistor Suburranus*. — Longinus gives this example of a Ludicrous hyperbole.

Ἄγρον ἐσχ' ἐλαττω γῆν ἔχοντ' ἄρ' ἐπισολῆσ  
Ἀκκωνικῆσ. ————— *De Subl. sect. 37.*

“ He

Strobilus, in the play, ridicules the miser, by saying, "That he saved the parings of his nails, and used to exclaim, that he was undone when he saw the smoke of his fire escaping through the chimney\*." But the most profligate wag that ever appeared in modern comedy could not make the moral or intellectual virtues of a good man ridiculous, merely by magnifying them; though, by misrepresenting, or by connecting her with ludicrous imagery, he might no doubt raise a momentary smile at the expence even of Virtue herself.

Humorous Amplification will generally be found to imply a mixture of plausibility and absurdity, or of likeness and dissimilitude. Butler's hero speaks in very hyperbolical terms of the acute feelings occasioned by kicking and cudgelling :

Some have been beaten, till they know  
 What wood the cudgel's of, by the blow ;  
 Some kick'd, until they can feel, whether  
 A shoe be Spanish or neat's leather †.

" He was owner of a field not so large as a Lacedemonian epistle;" — which sometimes consisted of no more than two or three words. Vide Quintil. Orat. Inst. lib. 8. cap. 3. & 6. Greek and Latin, we see, may be quoted on trifling as well as important subjects.

\* Plaut. Aulul. act 2. sc. 4.

† Hudibras, part 2. canto 1. vers. 221.

The fact is impossible;—hence the *want of relation* between the cause and the pretended effect. Yet when we reflect, that the qualities of wood and leather are perceived by sense, and that some of them may be perceived by the touch or feeling, there appears something like plausibility in what is said;—and hence the *seeming relation* between the pretended effect and the cause. And an additional incongruity presents itself, when we compare the seriousness of the speaker with the absurdity of what is spoken.—When Smollet, in one of his novels, describing violent fear, says, “He stared like the gorgon’s head, with his mouth wide open, and each particular hair crawling and twining like an animated serpent,” he raises the portrait far above nature; but at the same time gives it an apparent plausibility, from the effect which fear is supposed to have in making the hair stand on end.—It is, I confess, an awkward thing, to comment upon these and the like passages: and I am afraid, the reader may be tempted to say of the ludicrous quality in the hands of one who thus analyses it, that,

Like following life in creatures we dissect,  
We lose it in the moment we detect.

But I hope it will be considered, that I have no other way of explaining my subject in a satisfactory manner. One cannot lay open  
the

the elementary parts of any animal or vegetable system, without violating its outward beauty.

As hyperboles are very common, being used by all persons on almost all occasions \*, it might be supposed, that, by the frequency of this figure, mirth could easily be promoted in conversation, and a character for humour acquired, with little expence of thought, and without any powers of genius. But that would be a mistake. Familiar hyperboles excite neither laughter nor astonishment. All ludicrous and all sublime exaggeration, is characterised by an uncommonness of thought or language. And laughable appearances in general, whether exhibited to the senses or to the fancy, will for the most part be found to imply something unexpected, and to produce some degree of surprize.

III. Laughter often arises from the discovery of unexpected *likeness* between objects apparently *dissimilar* : and the greater the apparent dissimilitude, and new-discovered resemblance, the greater will be the surprize attending the discovery, the more striking the opposition of contrariety and relation, and the more lively the risible emotion. All men, and all children, have a tendency to mark resemblances ; hence the allegories, similes, and metaphors, so frequent in com-

\* See Essay on Poetry, part 2. chap. 1. sect. 3. § 5.

mon discourse: but readily to find out similitudes that are not obvious, and were never found out before, is no ordinary talent. The person possessed of it is called a man of *wit*; especially if at the same time he possess that other talent of conveying his meaning in concise, perspicuous, and natural language. For I agree with Locke, that “Wit consists chiefly in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy\* :” — And I also agree with Pope, that “an easy delivery, as well as perfect conception;” — and with Dryden, that “propriety of words as well as of thought,” is necessary to the formation of true wit. Images and comparisons, conveyed in obscure terms, or in too many words, have little effect upon the mind, because they oblige us to take up time in collecting all the parts of the idea; which must lessen our surprise, and abate the vivacity of the consequent emotion: and if the language, instead of being natural, were quaint and elaborate, we should be disgusted, from an opinion, that the whole was the effect of art, rather than the instantaneous effort of a playful imagination.

\* Essay on Human Understanding, book 2. chap. 11. § 2.

It is a rule in serious writing, that similitudes should be neither too obvious, nor too remote. If too obvious, they offend by their insignificancy, give a mean opinion of the author's inventive powers, and afford little variety, because they suggest that only which the reader supposes himself to be already acquainted with. If too remote, they distract the reader's attention; and they show, that the author's fancy is wandering from his subject, and therefore that he himself is not suitably affected with it; — a fault which we blame in a serious writer, as well as in a public speaker or player. Familiar allusions, such as every body may make every day, are to be avoided in humorous composition also; not only because they are insignificant, yield no variety, and give a mean idea of the author, but likewise because they have not incongruity enough to be ludicrous\*: — for when we have been  
long

\* Swift's Song of Similes, *My passion is as mustard strong*, &c. will perhaps occur to the reader as an exception. And it is true of that humorous piece, that most of the comparisons are not only common, but even proverbial. But then there is, in the way of applying them, a species of novelty, that shows a lively and singular turn of fancy in the author, and occasions an agreeable surprize to the reader: and the mutual relation, owing to the juxta-position, of so many dissonant ideas and incongruous proverbs, cannot fail to heighten greatly the ludicrous effect. Common, or even proverbial, allusions may successfully enough be introduced into burlesque,



long accustomed to compare certain things together, or to view them as united in the same assemblage, the one so constantly introduces the other into the mind, that we come to look upon them as congenial. — But in ludicrous writing, comparisons, if the point of resemblance be clearly expressed, and the thing alluded to sufficiently known, can scarce be too remote: for here the author is not supposed to be in earnest, and therefore we allow full scope to his fancy; and here the more remote the comparison, the more heterogeneous are the objects compared, and the greater the contrast of congruity and unsuitableness.

Persons who would pass for wits are apt affectedly to interlard their ordinary discourse with similitudes; which, however, unless they are uncommon, as well as apposite, will only betray the barrenness of the speaker's fancy. Fielding ridicules this sort of pedantry, in a dialogue between a bad poet and a player. "Plays (says the man of rhyme) are like trees, which will not grow without nourishment; but, like mushrooms, they shoot up spontaneously, as it were, in a

lesque, when they surprise by the peculiarity of their application. In this case, though familiar in themselves, they are remote in regard to the subject, and apparently incongruous; and may therefore raise our opinion of the author's wit: as a clock made with the tools of a blacksmith would evidence uncommon dexterity in the artist.

“ rich foil. The muses, like vines, may be  
 “ pruned, but not with a hatchet. The  
 “ town, like a peevish child, knows not what  
 “ it desires, and is always best pleased with  
 “ a rattle \*.”

As some comparisons add to the beauty and sublimity of serious composition, so others may heighten the ludicrous effect of wit and humour. In what respects the former differ from the latter, will be seen afterwards. At present I shall only specify the several classes of ludicrous similitudes, and give an example or two in each, with a view to illustrate my theory.

1. One mean object may be compared to another mean object in such a way as to provoke laughter. In this case, as there is no opposition of meanness and dignity, it will be proper, in order to make the combination sufficiently incongruous, that the thing alluded to, if familiar in itself, be remote in regard to the subject, and such as one would not be apt to think of, on such an occasion.

“ I do remember him (says Falstaff, speaking of Justice Shallow) at Clement’s Inn,  
 “ like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring. When he was naked, he was for  
 “ all the world like a forked radish, with a

\* See the History of Joseph Andrew’s, book 3. chap. 10. The whole dialogue is exquisitely humorous.

“ head fantastically carved upon it with a  
“ knife \*.”

He snatch'd his whinyard up, that fled  
When he was falling off his steed,  
As rats do from a falling house †.

The reader will think, perhaps, that there is even in these examples something of greatness mixed with meanness, as well as in the following :

Instead of trumpet and of drum,  
Which makes the warrior's stomach come,  
And whets men's valour sharp, like beer,  
By thunder turn'd to vinegar ‡,

But that mixture is more observable, when,  
2. Things important, serious, or great, are ludicrously compared to such as are mean, frivolous, or vulgar. King Arthur, in the tragedy of Tom Thumb, hints at an analogy between two feelings, that were never before thought to have any thing in common.

I feel a sudden pain within my breast,  
Nor know I, whether it proceed from love,  
Or only the wind-colic. Time must show.

\* Second part of K. Henry IV. act 3.

† Hudibras.

‡ Ibid.

“ Wisdom (says Swift) is a fox, who, after  
 “ long hunting, will at last cost you the  
 “ pains to dig out: it is a cheese, which,  
 “ by how much the richer, has the thicker,  
 “ the homelier, and the coarser coat, and  
 “ whereof, to a judicious palate, the mag-  
 “ gots are the best: it is a sack-posset,  
 “ wherein the deeper you go, you will find  
 “ it the sweeter. Wisdom is a hen, whose  
 “ cackling we must value and consider, be-  
 “ cause it is attended with an egg. But then,  
 “ lastly, Wisdom is a nut, which, unless  
 “ you chuse with judgement, may cost you  
 “ a tooth, and pay you with nothing but  
 “ a worm\*.”

Music in general, especially military mu-  
 sic, is an object of great dignity to the seri-  
 ous poet; he describes it with sublime allu-  
 sions, and in the most harmonious language.  
 Butler, by a contrary artifice, makes one spe-  
 cies of it ridiculous.

The kettle-drum, whose fullen dub  
 Sounds — like the hooping of a tub.

3. Things in themselves ludicrous and  
 mean may become more ludicrous, by being  
 compared to such as are serious or great; and  
 that, first, when the serious object alluded  
 to is mentioned in simple terms, without

\* Introduction to the Tale of a Tub.

debasement or exaggeration \*; — secondly, when it is purposely degraded by vulgar language and mean circumstances †; — and, thirdly, when it is exhibited in all the pomp of numbers and description ‡. Examples of the two first cases are common in *burlesque*; the third is peculiar to the *mock-heroic* style.

From these remarks it will appear, that the risible emotion may in various ways be raised or increased by comparison and similitude. Metaphor, allegory, and the other tropes and figures founded in resemblance, may in like manner heighten the effect of ludicrous composition.

Without multiplying examples, I shall only observe, of the Allegory in particular, that, provided its design be important and obvious, a great disproportion, in point of dignity, between what it expresses and what it signifies, will not convey any ludicrous idea to a sound mind; unless where an author is at pains to degrade his allegory, either by the extreme meanness of the allusion, or by connecting it with something laughable in the circumstances of phraseology. The fables and parables of ancient times, were not intended to raise laughter, but to instruct mankind. Accordingly, those Greek apo-

\* See Hudibras, part 1. can. 1. vers. 289.

† See Hudibras, part 2. can. 2. vers. 595.

‡ See Dunciad, book 2. vers. 181.

logues, which are ascribed to Esop, and bear undoubted marks of antiquity, are delivered in the most simple style, and without any effort to draw the reader's attention to ludicrous ideas, except when these make a part of the story \*. But some modern fabulists, particularly L'Estrange, are anxious to have their fables considered, not only as instructive allegories, but also as merry tales; and, in order to make them such, frequently employ ludicrous images, and the most familiar diction. Whether this, or the ancient, form of the apologue, deserve the preference, I shall not now inquire. But I could wish, that where the moral was of great importance, and connected with sacred things, we had, in our fables, imitated rather the simplicity of ancient language, than the levity of modern wit. Ridiculous ideas, associated by custom, with religious truths, can have no good effect upon the mind. And in this view, the book called *Scotch Presbyterian eloquence displayed* must ever be held in abhorrence by the friends of reli-

\* And when there is any thing laughable in the circumstances, it often appears to greater advantage in the simple Greek, than in the most elaborate modern paraphrase. The reader may compare *Αλώπηξ και Κόραξ* with *Le Corbeau et le Renard* of Fontaine. The conclusion of the former is remarkably expressive and picturesque, as well as simple: *Ὁ δὲ κόραξ ἀκόντας ταῦτα, ἢ χαινωθεὶς τοῖς ἐπαίνοις, ῥίψας τὸ κρέας, μεγάλως ἐκεκράγει, &c.*

gion, even though the writer could be vindicated from the charge of wilful and malicious falsehood. And I cannot but think, that, in this view, even the *Tale of a Tub*, notwithstanding its unequalled merit as a piece of humorous writing, is blameable, in the general tenor of the allegory, as well as in particular passages. — Are you then one of those gloomy mortals, who think religion an enemy to jocularities? By no means. If I were, I should not now be writing an *Essay on Laughter*. Christianity is, in my opinion, not merely a friend to cheerfulness, but the only thing in the world which can make a considerate mind rationally and permanently cheerful. But between smiling and sneering, between complacency and contempt, between innocent mirth and unseasonable buffoonery, there seems to me to be a very wide difference.

After what Addison in the *Spectator*, and Dryden in one of his long prefaces, have said against Hudibrastic rhimes, one can hardly venture to affirm, that a smile may sometimes be occasioned by those unexpected coincidences of sound. I confess, however, that I have been entertained with them in Swift and Butler; and should think him a prudish critic who could turn up his nose at the following couplets :

And pulpit, drum ecclesiastic  
Was beat with fist, instead of a stick. —

With words far bitterer than wormwood,  
 That would in Job or Grizel stir mood. —  
 Though stored with deletery medicines,  
 Which whosoever took is dead since, —  
 There was an ancient sage philosopher,  
 Who had read Alexander Ross over. —

I grant, that these combinations, considered as wit, have little or no merit. Yet they seem to possess in a certain degree the ludicrous character, and to derive it from the *diversity* of the words and meaning as contrasted with the unexpected *similarity* of the sounds. In ordinary rhimes, the sound, being expected, gives no surprize; and, being common, seems natural, and a thing of course: but when two or three words, in the end of one line, correspond in sound to two or three syllables of the same word, in the end of another, the *jarring coincidence* is more striking and more surprizing. But as they surprize the more, the less they are expected, and the less they seem to be sought for, these rhimes must lose their effect when too frequent. And the same thing must happen, when they are incorrect, on account of the imperfect resemblance, and because every body knows it is an easy matter to bring words together that have some *letters* only in common: and therefore one is rather offended than entertained with the rhyme of this couplet of Prior:

Know



Know then, when Phebus' rays inspect us,  
First, Sir, I read, and then I breakfast.

Hudibrastic rhimes can take place only in burlesque\*; such trifling being unfuitable to all serious poetry, and even to the affected solemnity of the mock-heroic.

Some critics, taking all their notions from the practice of Greece and Rome, have represented rhyme of every kind as a ridiculous thing. But that cannot be ridiculous, to which we are continually accustomed; which, independent on custom, is in itself almost universally pleasing; and which has acquired additional grace and dignity, by being so much used as an ornament in our most beautiful compositions. Similarity of

\* Hobbes, partly by a rhyme of this kind, and partly by a misapprehension of Homer's language, has turned into gross burlesque one of the most admired descriptions in all poetry.

Ἦ, ἢ κινάνησιν ἐπ' ὄφρουσι γευσε Κρονίων  
 Αμβρόσιαι δ' ἄρα χαῖται ἐπερρώσαντο ἀνάκτορος  
 Κρατος ἀπ' ἀθανάτοιο, μέγαν δ' ἐλελίξεν ὀλύμπου, &c.  
*Iliad. I. 528.*

This said, with his black brows he to her *nodded*,  
 Wherewith displayed were his locks divine;  
 Olympus shook at stirring of his *godhead*;  
 And Thetis from it jump'd into the brine.

The translator shows also his ignorance of the English tongue, in the use he makes of the last word of his third line.

found in contiguous verses gives pleasure to all children and illiterate persons, and does not naturally offend the ear of any modern European, however learned. Nay we have reason to think, that something of this sort, in the end or beginning \* of words, has in all

\* A similarity of sound in the *beginning* of contiguous words, or rather in their initial consonants, has of late been called *alliteration*. Some authors speak of it in terms of the utmost contempt and abhorrence; and as if none but fools and fops could take any pleasure in it. And surely when it recurs often, and seems to be the effect of study, it gives a finical appearance to poetry, and becomes offensive. But that many good judges of poetical harmony have been pleased with it, might be made appear by innumerable examples from Lucretius, Spenser, Dryden, and others. Indeed, previous to the influence of custom, it would not be easy to determine, whether a similarity of sound, in the beginning, or in the end, of contiguous words, were likely to produce the more rational, or more durable entertainment. That both alliteration and rhyme, though not equally perhaps, are however naturally, pleasing to the ears of our people, is evident, not only from what may be observed in children and peasants, but also from the composition of many of our old proverbs, in which some of the words seem to have been chosen for the sake of the initial letters; as, Many men many minds, Spare to speak and spare to speed, Money makes the mare to go, Love me little love me long, Manners make the man, &c. — *Christ's kirk on the green*, and most of the old Scotch ballads, abound in alliteration. And some ancient English poems are more distinguished by this, than by any other poetical contrivance. In the works of Langland, even where no regard is had to rhyme, and but little to a rude sort of Anapestic Rhythm, it seems to have been

all ages been agreeable to all nations whatsoever, the Greeks and Romans not excepted. For to what other *ultimate* principle, than the love of similar final sounds, shall we ascribe the frequent coincidence, in termination, of the Greek and Latin participle and adjective, with the substantive? Homer himself often repeats certain harmonious syllables of similar sound; which he might have avoided, and with which, therefore, as he seems on some occasions rather to seek for than to shun them, we may presume that he was pleased\*. It is true, the Greeks and Romans did not admit, in their poetry, those similar endings of lines, which we call Rhime. The reason probably was, that in the classical tongues,

a rule, that three words at least of each line should begin with the same letter :

Death came driving after, and all to dust passed  
Kynghs and Kayfars, Knightes and Popes.

\* Virgil has a few of the same sort,

Cornua velatarum obvertimus antennarum.  
*Æneid.* III.

— formæ magnorum ululare luporum.  
*Æneid.* VII.

I do not find, that the ancient critics have taken any notice of this peculiarity. Their *ὁμοιοτελευτον* seems to have been a coincidence of sound rather in the last words of contiguous clauses, than in the last syllables or letters of contiguous words. See Demet. Phaler. § 281.; and Rollin's Quintilian, lib. 9. cap. 3. § 2.

on account of their regular structure, like terminations were so frequent, that it required more dexterity, and occasioned a more pleasing suspense to the ear, to keep them separate, than to bring them together. But in the modern tongues the case is different; and therefore rhyme may in them have a good effect, though in Greek and Latin it must have had a bad one. Besides, one end of rhimes in modern poetry, is to distinguish it more effectually from prose: the Greeks and Romans distinguished theirs by the measure, and by the composition, upon which the genius of their languages allowed them to bestow innumerable graces, in respect of arrangement, harmony, and variety, whereof the best modern tongues, from the irregularity of their structure, particularly from their want of inflexion, are but moderately susceptible: and therefore, of rhyme, as a mark of distinction, our poetry may sometimes stand in need, though theirs did not. In fact we find, that Blank verse, except where the want of rhyme is compensated, as it is in Milton, by the harmony and variety of the composition, can never have a good effect in our *heroic* poetry: of which any person may be satisfied, who looks into Trapp's Virgil, or who, by changing a word in each couplet, takes away the rhyme from any part of Pope's Homer. But the structure of the Miltonic numbers is so finely diversified, and so transcendently harmonious,

nious, that, in the perusal of Paradise Lost, we have no more reason to regret the want of rhyme, than, in reading the Essay on Man, or Dryden's Fables, to lament that they were not written in blank verse.

IV. Dignity and Meanness united, or supposed to be united, in the same assemblage, form a copious source of ludicrous combination. Innumerable are the examples that might be given on this head, but I shall confine my remarks to a few of the most obvious.

1. Mean sentiments appearing unexpectedly in a serious argument, so as to form what is called an anticlimax, are often productive of laughter. Waller, in a magnificent encomium on the Summer Islands, provokes a smile instead of admiration, by a contrast of this kind.

With candid plantanes, and the juicy pine,  
On choicest melons and sweet grapes they dine,  
And — with potatoes fat their wanton swine.

2. Mean sentiments, or expressions, in the mouth of those who assume airs of dignity, have the same effect. Dogberry is a memorable instance. — “ Bombard the suburbs  
“ of Pera, (says a mad shoemaker who fancies himself the King of Prussia, in one of  
“ Smollet's novels) — make a desert of Lu-  
“ fatia; — tell my brother Henry to pass  
“ the Elbe with fifty squadrons; — send  
“ hither

“ hither my chief engineer ; — *I’ll lay all the shoes in my shop*, the breach will be practicable in four-and-twenty hours.” — *Dicta factis exæquanda*, is a maxim in historical writing ; and, in common life, it may be laid down as a rule to those who wish to avoid the ridicule of others, that they proportion their behaviour to their accomplishments.

3. Mean or common thoughts delivered in pompous language, form a laughable incongruity ; of which our mock tragedies, and too often our serious ones, afford many examples. Upon this principle, the character of Pistol is still ludicrous, though the race of coxcombs of whom he is the representative, has been long extinct. The Splendid Shilling of Philips, in which the Miltonic numbers and phraseology are applied to a trifling subject, is an exquisite specimen of this sort of ridicule ; and no part of it more so, than the following lines :

Not blacker tube, nor of a shorter size,  
Smokes Cambro-Briton (versed in pedigree,  
Sprung from Cadwallader and Arthur, kings  
Full famous in romantic tale) ; when he  
O’er many a craggy hill, and barren cliff,  
Upon a cargo of famed Cestrian cheese,  
High-overshadowing rides. —————

4. A sublime thought, or solemn expression, unexpectedly introduced in the midst of something frivolous, seldom fails to pro-

voke a smile, unless it betray unseasonable levity, or want of taste in the author.

My hair I'd powder in the women's way,  
 And dress, and talk of dressing, more than they.  
 I'll please the maids of honour, if I can;  
 Without black velvet breeches—what is man! \*

5. An important or violent passion, proceeding from a cause apparently trifling, is apt (as was remarked already) to excite laughter in the indifferent spectator. Here is a two-fold incongruity; a great effect is produced by a small cause, and an important passion by an unimportant object. Sancho Pança clinging in the dark to the wall of a ruin, with the dreadful apprehension that a bottomless gulph was beneath him, while his feet were within a few inches of the firm ground, is as laughable an instance of distress as can well be imagined. Sentiments, too, that partake but little of the nature of passion, are sometimes ludicrous, when they seem more important than the occasion requires. As when Parson Adams, to shew that he was not destitute of money, produces half a guinea, and seriously adds, that ostentation of riches was not his motive for displaying it. A finer piece of humour was never written, than Addison's Journal

\* *The Man of Taste*, by the Rev. Mr Bramstone, in Doddsley's Collection.

of the Court of honour in the *Tatler*; in which every reader perceives the opposition of dignity and meanness:—the latter arising from the insignificance of the causes; the former from the serious air of the narrative, from the accuracy of detail and minuteness of enquiry in the several examinations, and from the grave deportment of the judge and jury. Indeed, through the whole work, the personage of Isaac Bickerstaff is supported with inimitable pleasantry. The conjurer, the politician, the man of humour, the critic; the seriousness of the moralist, and the mock dignity of the astrologer; the vivacities and the infirmities peculiar to old age, are all so blended and contrasted in the censor of Great Britain, as to form a character equally complex and natural, equally laughable and respectable.

6. To this head may perhaps be referred those passages, whereof the humour results from an elaborate or minute, and at the same time unexpected, illustration of what is obvious or frivolous.

“ *Grumio*. A fire, good Curtis. — *Curtis*.  
 “ Is my master and his wife coming, *Grumio*? — *Gru*. O, aye, Curtis, aye; and  
 “ therefore fire, fire. *Cast on no water* \*.”

So when two dogs are fighting in the streets,  
 With a third dog one of the two dogs meets;

\* *Taming of the Shrew.*



With angry tooth he bites him to the bone,  
And this dog smarts for what that dog has done \*.

7. Mean circumstances in solemn description, seem ridiculous to those who are sensible of the incongruity, except where the effect of that incongruity is counteracted by certain causes to be specified hereafter. Of this blunder in composition the poetry of Blackmore supplies thousands of examples. The lines on Etna, quoted in the treatise on the Bathos, are well known. By his contrivance, the mountain is made to labour, not with a subterraneous fire and external conflagration, but with a fit of the colic; an idea, that seems to have been familiar to him (for we meet with it in other parts of his works); whether from his being subject to that distemper, or, as a physician, particularly successful in curing it, I cannot say. This poet seems to have had no notion of any thing more magnificent, than the usages of his own time and neighbourhood; which, accordingly, he transfers to the most awful subjects, and thus degrades into burlesque what he meant to raise to sublimity. He tells us, that when creation was finished, there was a great rejoicing in heaven, with fire-works and illuminations, and that the angels threw blazing meteors from the

\* Fielding's Thom Thumb.

battlements \*. To the Supreme Being he most indecently ascribes a variety of mechanical operations; and represents him as *giving commissions to envoys and agents* to take care of the *heavenly interests* in the land of Palestine, and employing *pioneers to make a road* for him and his army. Nay he speaks, of *household troops and guards*, by whose attendance the court of the Almighty is both *graced and defended* †. Indeed the general tenor of this author's sacred poetry is so enormously absurd, as to move the indignation of a reader of taste, and consequently suppress the laughter, that such incongruity could not fail to raise, if the subject were less interesting ‡.

But here it may be asked, What is the characteristic of Meanness? and what the general nature of those circumstances, sentiments, and allusions, which, by falling below an important subject, have a tendency to become ridiculous.—The following brief remarks will suggest a hint or two for answering this question.

First: Nothing natural is mean, unless it convey a disgustful idea. The picture of Ulysses' dog ||, old and blind, and neglected,

\* Prince Arthur, p. 50. fourth edition.

† Paraphrases of the Psalms, &c.

‡ See the next chapter.

|| Odyss. lib. 17.

is not mean ; but the circumstance of his being covered with vermin should have been omitted, because it is both offensive and unnecessary. The description of Evander's fields and cottages, in Virgil \*, so far from being mean, is more beautiful and of greater dignity, than that of the sun's palace in Ovid, because more natural, more pleasing, and more instructive. Even the vices and crimes of mankind, the cunning of Iago, the perfidy of Macbeth, the cruelty of Mezentius, the pride of Agamemnon, the fury of Achilles, may, from the ends to which they operate, and from the moral purposes for which the poet introduces them, acquire dignity sufficient to entitle them to a place in serious poetry of the highest order. Natural views of human character in every condition of life, of human passions even in the most uncultivated minds, and of the external world even where destitute of all ornament, may be rendered both useful and agreeable, and may therefore serve to embellish the most sublime performances ; provided that indelicacy be kept at a distance, and the language elevated to the pitch of the composition.

But, secondly, in judging of this sort of propriety, respect must be had to the notions and manners of the people to whom the work was originally addressed : for, by a

\* *Æneid.* lib. 8.

change of circumstances, any mode of life, any profession, almost any object, may, without losing its name, forfeit part of its original dignity. Few callings are now held in less esteem, than that of itinerant ballad-singers; and yet their predecessors the Minstrels were accounted not only respectable but sacred. — If we take our idea of a shepherd from those who keep sheep in this country, we shall have no adequate sense of the propriety of many passages in old authors who allude to that character. Shepherds in ancient times were men of great distinction. The riches, and consequently the power, of many political societies, depended then on their flocks and herds; and we learn, from Homer, that the sons and favourites of kings, and, from Scripture, that the patriarchs, took upon them the employment of shepherds. This gave dignity to an office, which in those days it required many virtues and great abilities to execute. Those shepherds must have been watchful and attentive in providing accommodation for their flocks; and strong and valiant, to defend them from robbers and beasts of prey, which in regions of great extent and thinly peopled, would be frequently met with. We find, that David's duty as a shepherd obliged him to encounter a lion and a bear, which he slew with his own hand. In a word, a good shepherd was, in those times, a character in the highest degree respectable both for dignity and virtue.

And

And therefore we need not wonder, that, in holy writ, the most sacred persons should be compared to good shepherds; that kings, in Homer, should be called shepherds of the people\*; and that Christian ministers should

\* A plain and unaffected literal version of Homer, well executed, would be a valuable work. In the perusal indeed it would not be so pleasing as Pope's Translation; nor could it convey any adequate idea of the harmony of the original: but by preserving the figures, allusions, and turns of language, peculiar to the great father of poetry, it would give those who are ignorant of Greek a juster notion of the manners of his age, and of the style of his composition, than can be learned from any translation of him that has yet appeared. — Something of this kind the world had reason to expect from Madame Dacier, but was disappointed. Homer, as dressed out by that Lady, has more of the Frenchman in his appearance, than of the old Grecian. His beard is close-shaved, his hair is powdered, and there is even a little *rouge* upon his cheek. To speak more intelligibly, his simple and nervous diction is often wire-drawn into a flashy and feeble paraphrase, and his imagery as well as harmony sometimes annihilated by abbreviation. Nay to make him the more modish, the good lady is at pains to patch up his style with unnecessary phrases and flourishes in the French taste; which have just such an effect in a translation of Homer, as a bag-wig and snuff-box would have in a picture of Achilles. — The French tongue has a simplicity and a style of figures and phrases peculiar to itself; but is so circumscribed by the mode, that it will hardly admit either the ornaments or the plainness of ancient language. *Shepherd of the people* is a favourite expression of Homer's, and is indeed a beautiful periphrasis: it occurs, I think, twelve times in the first five books of the Iliad, and in M. Dacier's prose version of those books, only once. — A celebrated French Translator of Demosthenes makes the orator address;

should even now take the name of Pastors, and speak, of the souls committed to their care, under the denomination of a flock.

Is then Homer's poetry chargeable with meanness, because it represents Achilles preparing supper for his guests, the princess Nausicaa washing the clothes of the family, Eumeus making his own shoes, Ulysses the wooden frame of his own bed, and the princes of Troy harnessing their father's chariot? By no means. The poet painted the manners as he saw them: and those offices could not in his time be accounted mean, which in his time employed occasionally persons of the highest rank and merit. Nay in these offices there is no intrinsic meanness; they are useful and necessary: and even a modern hero might be in circumstances, in which he would think it a singular piece of good fortune to be able to perform them. Whatever serves to make us independent, will always (in the general opinion of mankind) possess dignity sufficient to raise it far above ridicule, when described in proper language. In Homer's days, society was more unsettled than it is now; and princes and great men, being obliged to be more ad-

dress his countrymen, not with the manly simplicity of *Ye men of Athens*, but by the Gothic title of *Gentlemen*: which is as real burlesque, and almost as great an anachronism, as that passage of Prior, where Protegenes's maid invites Apelles to drink tea.

venturous, were subject to greater changes of fortune, and as liable to cold, weariness, and hunger, as the meanest of their people. It was necessity that made them acquainted with all the arts of life. Nor was their dignity more affected by the employments above mentioned, than that of a modern prince would be, by riding the great horse, or putting on his own clothes.

Thirdly: Every serious writer or speaker sustains a certain character: — an historian, that of a man who wishes to know the truth of facts, and to record them agreeably; a preacher, that of one who is deeply affected with the truths of religion, and anxious to impress them upon others; and an epic poet is to be considered as a person, contemplating with admiration a series of great events, and employing all the powers of language, harmony, and fiction, to describe them in the most interesting manner. Now by a peculiar kind of sagacity, either instinctive, or derived from experience, all people of taste know, what thoughts and words and modes of expression are suitable to an author's character, and what are otherwise. If, when he is supposed to be taken up with admiration of some great object, it should appear, from his language, allusions, or choice of circumstances, that his fancy is wandering to things remote from, or disproportioned to, the thoughts that occupy his mind, we are struck with

the impropriety ; as we should be with the unsuitableness of that man's behaviour, who, while he kneeled, and repeated a prayer, should at the same time employ himself in winding up his watch, counting his money, or adjusting his periwig at a looking-glass.

In general, that is a *mean* circumstance, a *mean* allusion, a *mean* expression, which lessens or debases our idea of what it was intended to embellish or magnify. It always brings disappointment, but not always painful disappointment : for meanness may give rise to jocularities, as well as to contempt, disgust, or indignation.

8. Parodies may be ludicrous, from the opposition between *similarity* of phrase, and *diversity* of meaning, even though both the original and the imitation be serious. The following lines in themselves contain no laughable matter :

Bread was his only food, his drink the brook,  
 So small a salary did his rector send :  
 He left his laundress all he had, a book :  
 He found in death, 'twas all he wish'd, a friend.

Yet one reads them with a smile, when one recollects the original :

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere ;  
 Heaven did a recompense as largely send :  
 He gave to Misery all he had, a tear ;  
 He gain'd from Heaven, 'twas all he wish'd, a  
 friend.

But -



But in most cases the ridicule of parodies will be greatly heightened, when the original is sublime or serious, and the imitation frivolous or mean. The *Lutrin* *Dunciad*, and *Rape of the Lock*, abound in examples.

Parodies produce their full effect on those only who can trace the imitation to its original. *Clarissa's* harangue, in the fifth canto of the last-mentioned poem, gives pleasure to every reader; but to those who recollect that divine speech of *Sarpedon* \*, whereof this is an exact parody, it must be entertaining in the highest degree.—Hence it is, that writers of the greatest merit are most liable to be parodied: for if the reader perceive not the relation between the copy and its archetype, the humour of the parody is lost; and this relation he will not perceive, unless the original be familiar to him. Much of *Lucian's* humour lies in his parodies; the phraseology and composition of *Demosthenes* in particular he often mimics: and it is reasonable to suppose, that we should be more affected with the humorous writings of the ancients, if we were better acquainted with the authors to whom they occasionally allude. Certain it is, that Parody was much in use among them. *Aristotle* speaks of one *Hegemon* as the inventor of it †; and justly refers parody in wri-

\* *Iliad*, xii. vers. 310.—328.

† *Arist. Poet. sect.* 2.

ting, and caricatura in painting, to the same species of imitation, namely, to that in which the original is purposely debased in the copy. Homer, Virgil, and Horace, have been more frequently parodied than any other authors. Of modern performances, Hamlet's and Cato's soliloquies, and Gray's Elegy in a country church-yard, have been distinguished in this way. These mock imitations are honourable to the original authors, because tacit acknowledgements of their popularity:—but I cannot applaud those wits who take the same freedom with the phraseology of Scripture, as Doddsley has done in his burlesque chronicle of the kings of England. I do not think that he meant any harm; but it is unwise to annex ludicrous ideas to language that should ever be accounted sacred.

9. The Ludicrous Style may be divided into two sorts, the *Mock-heroic*, and (taking the word in a strict sense) the *Burlesque*. Of the former the *Dunciad* is a standard, and *Hudibras* of the latter. A mixture of dignity and meanness is discernible in both. In the first, mean things are made ludicrous by dignity of language and versification; and therefore parodies or imitations of the style and numbers, of sublime poetry, have a very good effect. Thus Homer's *Iliad* is the prototype of the *Batrachomyomachia* \*, *Paradise Lost* of the *Splendid Shilling*, and Virgil of

\* The Battle of the Frogs and Mice.

the Dunciad. Solemnity is the character assumed by the mock-heroic poet; he considers little things as great, and describes them accordingly. — The *burlesque* author is a buffoon by profession. Great things, when he has occasion to introduce them, he considers as little; and degrades them by mean words and colloquial phrases, by allusions to the manners and business of low life, and by a peculiar levity or want of dignity in the construction of his numbers. Ancient facts and customs are sometimes burlesqued by modern phraseology\*; as the statue of Cesar or Alexander would be, by a modern dress; — by that dress, which is too familiar to our eye to command respect, and which we see every day worn by men of all characters, both good and bad, both important and insignificant. — Yet the statue of a modern hero in the dress of Alexander or Cesar would not be ludicrous; — partly, because we are accustomed to see the best statues in ancient

\* Witness the following description of a Roman Triumph, in Hudib. p. 2. c. 2.

— As the Aldermen of Rome,  
 Their foes at training overcome,  
 Well mounted in their best array,  
 Upon a carre, and who but they!  
 And followed by a world of tall lads,  
 That merry ditties troll'd and ballads,  
 Did ride with many a good morrow,  
 Crying, Hey for our town, through the borough.

dresses;

dressés ; partly, because those dressés have more intrinsic beauty than the modern ; partly, because we have never seen them applied to any purpose but that of adorning the images of great men ; and partly, no doubt, because what bears the stamp of antiquity does naturally command veneration.

In accoutering ancient heroes for the modern stage, it were to be wished, that some regard were had to *Costume* and probability. Cato's wig is famous. We have seen Macbeth dressed in scarlet and gold, with a full-bottom'd periwig, which, on his usurping the sovereignty, was forthwith decorated with two additional tails. Nothing could guard such incongruity from the ridicule of those who know any thing of ancient manners, but either the transcendent merit of the actor and of the play, or the force of habit, which, as will appear by and by, has a powerful influence in suppressing risible emotions.—But is it not as absurd to make Cato and Macbeth speak English, as to dress them in periwigs ? No : the former practice is justified upon the plea of necessity ; but it can never be necessary to equip an ancient hero with a modern ornament which in itself is neither natural nor graceful. I admit, that the exact Roman dress would not suit the British stage : but might not something be contrived in its stead, which would gratify the unlearned part of the audience, without offending the rest ? If such a re-  
formation

formation shall ever be attempted, I hope care will be taken to avoid the error of those painters, who, by joining in one piece the fashions of different centuries, incur the charge of anachronism, and exhibit such figures on their canvas, as never appeared upon earth. I have in my eye a portrait, in other respects of great merit, of the late Marischal Keith; who appears habited in a suit of old Gothic armour, with ruffles of the present fashion at his wrists, a bag-wig on his head, and a musket in his hand. Alexander the Great, in a hat and feather, wielding a tomahawk, or snapping a pistol at the head of Clytus, would scarce be a greater impropriety. — But to return:

These two styles of writing, the *Mock-heroic* and the *Burlesque*, are not essential either to wit or to humour. A performance may be truly laughable, in which the *language* is perfectly serious and *adequate*. And as the pathos that results from incident is more powerful than what arises merely from vehemence of expression, so an humorous tale, delivered with a grave look and serious phraseology, like Pope's "Narrative of the phrenzy of John Dennis," or Arbuthnot's "Account of what passed in London on occasion of Whiston's prophecy," may be more ludicrous than either the Burlesque or Mock-heroic style could have made it. That a grave face heightens the effect of a merry story, has indeed been often observed; and,

if

if we suppose laughter to arise from an unexpected coincidence of relation and contrariety, is easily accounted for.

10. Mean sentiments, or unimportant phrases, delivered in heroic verse, are sometimes laughable, from the solemnity of the measure, and the opposite nature of the language and subject. Gay thought the following couplet ludicrous :

This is the ancient hand and eke the pen,  
Here is for horses hay, and meat for men.

But this, if continued, would lose its effect, by raising disgust, an emotion of greater authority than laughter. Nothing is less laughable than a dull poem ; but flashes of extreme absurdity may give an agreeable impulse to the spirits of the reader. Extreme absurdity is particularly entertaining in a short performance, where the author seriously meant to do his best ; as in epitaphs and love-letters written by illiterate persons. Here, if there is no apparent opposition of dignity and meanness, there may be other kinds of Risible incongruity ; — a vast disproportion between the intention and execution, between the seriousness of the author and the insignificance of his work ; besides the many odd contrasts in the work itself, — of mean phrases and sentiments aspiring to importance, of sounding words with little signification, of inconsistent or unrelated expressions,

pressions placed contiguously, of sentences that seem to promise much but end in nothing; not to mention those blunders in writing, and solecisms in language, that sometimes give a ludicrous air to what had a very solemn destination.

Modern language, adapted to those measures of poetry that are peculiar to Greek and Latin, will likewise appear ridiculous to such as are acquainted with the classic authors; on account of the unusual contrast of modern words and ancient rhythm. Hence the ludicrous awkwardness of an English hexameter. It looks as if a man were to walk the street, or come into a room, with the pace of a trotting horse. Between the movement, and that which moves, there is a manifest incongruity. Sir Philip Sidney attempted to introduce the hexameter into the English tongue, and has exemplified it in his *Arcadia*; but it suits not the genius of the language, and has never been adopted by any person who understood the true principles of English numbers. — Wallis, finding that the first verse of the common prose version of the second psalm was by accident an hexameter, has reduced the whole into that measure; but the sound is extremely uncouth. And Watts's English Sapphic ode on the Last Day, notwithstanding the awful subject, has something in the cadence that almost provokes a smile.

There is a poem well known in North  
 VOL. II. 3 E Britain,

Britain, which to a Scotchman who understands Latin is abundantly entertaining. It was written in the beginning of the last century, by the famous Drummond of Hawthornden. The measure is hexameter, the numbers Virgilian, and the language Latin mixed with Broad Scotch. Nothing can be more ludicrous than such a jumble. It is dignity and meanness in the extreme; — dignity of sound, and meanness of words and ideas. I shall not give a specimen; as the humour is local, and rather coarse, and the images, though strong, not quite delicate.

11. On some of the principles above mentioned, one might explain the ludicrous character of a certain class of absurdities to be met with in very respectable authors, and proceeding from a superabundance of wit, and the affectation of extraordinary refinement. It is not uncommon to say, of a person who is old, or has long been in danger from a disease supposed mortal, that “ he “ has one foot in the grave and the other “ following.” A certain author, speaking of a pious old woman, is willing to adopt this proverbial amplification, but by his efforts to improve it, presents a very laughable idea to his reader, when he says, “ that she had one foot in the grave, and “ the other — among the stars.” — The following verses (spoken by Cortez on his arrival in America) were once no doubt thought very fine; but the reader who attends to the  
 imagery



imagery will perceive that they are very absurd, and somewhat ridiculous :

On what new happy climate are we thrown,  
 So long kept secret, and so lately known ?  
 As if our old world modestly withdrew,  
 And here in private had brought forth a new\*.

Here, besides the jumble of incongruous ideas, there is on the part of the author a violent and solemn effort ending in a frivolous performance.

The pedantic solemnity of the elder gravedigger, in *Hamlet*, makes the absurdity of what he says doubly entertaining ; and the ridicule is yet further heightened by the seriousness of his companion, who listens to his nonsense, and thinks himself instructed by it. “ For here lies the point, (says the “ Clown), if I drown myself wittingly, it “ argues an act ; and an act hath three “ branches ; it is to act, to do, and to perform. Argal, she drowned herself wittingly.—*Other Clown*. Nay, but hear “ you, Goodman Delver.—*Clown*. Give “ me leave. Here lies the water, good ; “ here stands the man, good : if the man “ go to this water, and drown himself, it “ is, will he, nill he, he goes ; mark you “ that. But if the water come to him, and “ drown him, he drowns not himself. Ar-

\* Dryden's Indian Emperor.

“ gal, he that is not guilty of his own death,  
 “ shortens not his own life. ——— *Other Clown.*  
 “ But is this law? ——— *Clown.* Aye, marry  
 “ is it: crowner’s quest law.”

Cicero and Quintilian both observe, that an absurd answer, whether casual or intentional, may give rise to laughter\*; a remark which Erasmus had in view, perhaps, when he wrote his dialogue called *Absurda*. In this case, the mere juxtaposition of unsuitable ideas may, as already hinted, form the ludicrous quality. But if laughter is ever raised by a pertinent answer proceeding from the mouth of one from whom nothing but absurdity was expected, it would seem to be in part occasioned by the surprising disproportion of the cause to the effect, of the intellectual weakness of the speaker to the propriety of what is spoken. “ How shameful is it  
 “ that you should fall asleep? (said a dull  
 “ preacher to his drowsy audience); what,  
 “ that poor creature (pointing to an idiot  
 “ who was leaning on a staff and staring at  
 “ him) is both awake and attentive! Per-  
 “ haps, Sir, replied the fool, I should have  
 “ been asleep too, if I had not been an i-  
 “ diot.”

Whatever restraint good-breeding or good-nature may impose upon his company, the imperfect attempts of a foreigner to speak a

\* Cic. de Orat. lib. 2. § 68.; Quint. Inst. Orat. lib. 6. cap. 3.

language he is not master of, must be allowed to be somewhat ludicrous; for they are openly laughed at by children and clowns; and Shakespeare and Moliere have not disdained to make them the objects of comic ridicule. Nor would Aristotle, if we may judge from his definition of Comic Ridicule, have blamed them for it. In the person who speaks with the intelligence and figure of a man, and the incapacity of a child, there is something like an opposition of dignity and meanness, as well as of similarity and dissimilitude, in what he says compared with what he should say: there is too a disproportion between the performance and the effort; and there may be blunders that pervert the meaning. — Those solecisms, vulgarly called *Bulls*, are of different characters, and cannot perhaps be referred to any one class of laughable absurdity. If, as often happens, they disguise real nonsense with an appearance of sense, and proceed from apparent seriousness though real want of consideration in the speaker, their ludicrous nature may be explained on the principles already specified.

12. In language, there are three sorts of phraseology. — 1. Some words and phrases, being always necessary, are used by people of all conditions, and find a place in every sort of writing. These form the bulk of every language; and cannot be said to possess in themselves either meanness or dignity. In  
the

the sublimest compositions they are not ungraceful; in works of humour, and in familiar discourse, they may be employed with propriety; and, from the universality of their application, they have the advantage of being understood by all who speak the language to which they belong. — 2. Other expressions have a peculiar dignity, because found only in the more elevated compositions, or spoken only by persons of learning and distinction, and on the more solemn occasions of life. Such are the words and phrases peculiar to scripture and religion; such are those that in all polite languages constitute what is called the poetical dialect.\*; and such are most words of foreign original, which, though naturalized, are not in familiar use. — 3. There are also certain phrases and words, which may properly enough be called *mean*; because used chiefly by persons of no learning or breeding, or by others on familiar occasions only †, or in order to express

\* See Essay on Poetry, part 2. chap. 1. sect. 2.

† Castalio's Translation of the Old Testament does great honour to his learning, but not to his taste. The quaintness of his Latin style betrays a deplorable inattention to the simple majesty of his original. In the Song of Solomon he is particularly injudicious; debasing the magnificence of the language and subject by *Diminutives*, which, tho' expressive of *familiar endearment*, he should have known to be destitute of dignity, and therefore improper on solemn occasions. This incongruous mixture,

prefs what is trifling or contemptible. Such are trite proverbs; colloquial oaths, and forms of compliment; the ungrammatical phrases of conversation; the dialect peculiar to certain trades; the jargon of beggars, thieves, gamblers, and fops; foreign and provincial barbarisms, and the like. These, if intelligible, may be introduced in *burlesque* writing with good effect, as in *Hudibras* and the *History of John Bull*; but ought never to find a place in serious writing; nor even in the *Mock-heroic*, except perhaps in a short characteristical speech, like that of Sir Plume in the *Rape of the Lock*\*; nor indeed in any literary work where elegance is expected. This *Cant* style, as it is sometimes called, was very prevalent in England in the latter part of the last century; having been brought in by the courtiers of Charles the Second, who, to show their contempt for the solemn character that had distinguished the preceding period, ran into the opposite extreme,

of sublime ideas and words comparatively mean, has a very bad effect, and degrades the noblest poetry almost to the level of burlesque. “Mea columbula, ostende mihi  
 “ tuum vulticulum; fac ut audiam tuam voculam; nam  
 “ et voculam venustulam, et vulticulum habes lepidulum.  
 “ — Cerviculam habes Davidicæ turris similem. — Cer-  
 “ vicula quasi eburnea turricula. — Utinam esses mihi  
 “ quasi fraterculus, qui meæ mammas materculæ suxisses,  
 “ — Venio in meos hortulos, fororcula mea sponsa. —  
 “ Ego dormio, vigilante meo corculo,” &c.

\* See canto 4. vers. 127.

and affected profligacy of manners, profaneness of talk, and a loose ungrammatical vulgarity of expression. L'Estrange is full of it, not only in his Fables, where burlesque may be pardonable, but even in his Translations of Josephus and Tacitus\*. Eachard, by a similar indiscretion, has transformed the elegant Terence into a writer of farce and buffoonery. Nay, Dryden himself, in one or two instances, and perhaps in more, has burlesqued both Homer and Virgil, by interlarding his Translations with this beggarly dialect †. And some imprudent divines

\* He makes the grave and sublime Tacitus speak of some gentlemen, "who had *feathered their nests* in the "civil war between Cesar and Pompey;" and tells us, that the Emperor Vitellius was *lugged out of his hole* by those who came to kill him.

† So heavy a charge against so great an author ought not to be advanced without proof. — In Dryden's version of the first book of the Iliad, Jupiter addresses Juno in these words :

*My household curse, my lawful plague, the spy  
Of Jove's designs, his other squinting eye.*

Homer, in the same book, says, "The Gods were troubled in the palace of Jove, when Vulcan, the renowned artificer, began to address them in these words, "with a view to soothe his beloved mother, the white-arm'd Juno :"— which Dryden thus versifies :

*The limping smith observed the sadden'd feast,  
And hopping here and there, himself a jest,*

vines have employed it, where it is most pernicious, and absolutely intolerable, even in religion itself.

Rutherford's

*Put in his word, that neither might offend,  
To Jove obsequious, yet his mother's friend.*

Homer has been blamed, not without reason, for degrading his Gods into mortals; but Dryden has degraded them into blackguards. He concludes the book in a strain of buffoonery as gross as any thing in Hudibras :

*Drunken at last, and drowsy, they depart  
Each to his house, adorn'd with labour'd art  
Of the lame architect. The thundering God,  
Even he withdrew to rest, and had his load;  
His sweeming head to needful sleep apply'd,  
And Juno lay unheeded by his side.*

The passage literally rendered is no more than this. " Now, when the shining light of the sun was gone down, the other gods being inclined to slumber, departed to their several homes, to where Vulcan, the lame deity, renowned for ingenious contrivance, had built for each a palace. And Olympian Jove, the thunderer, went to the bed where, when sweet sleep came upon him, he was accustomed to repose. Thither ascending, he resigned himself to rest; and near him Juno, distinguished by the golden throne." — It is said, that Dryden once intended to translate the whole Iliad. Taking this first book for a specimen, I am glad, both on Homer's account and on his own, that he did not. It is tainted throughout with a dash of burlesque, (owing not only to his choice of words, but also to his paraphrases and additions), and with so much of the profane cant of his age, that if we were to judge of the poet by the translator, we should imagine the Iliad to have been partly designed for a satire upon the clergy.

Rutherford's Letters, well known in North Britain, are notorious in this way; not so much for the rudeness of the style in general, for that might be pardoned in a Scotch writer who lived one hundred and twenty years ago, as for the allusions and figures, which are inexcuseably gross and groveling. A reader who is unacquainted with the character of Rutherford might imagine, that those letters must have been written with a view to ridicule every thing that is sacred. And though there is reason to believe the author had no bad meaning, one cannot without horror see religion profaned by a phraseology which one would sooner expect

Virgil, in his ninth Eclogue, puts these words in the mouth of an unfortunate shepherd.

O Lycida, vivi pervenimus, advena nostri,  
 Quod nunquam veriti sumus, ut possessor agelli  
 Diceret, Hæc mea sunt, veteres migrate coloni.  
 Nunc victi, tristes, quoniam fors omnia versat,  
 Hos illi (quod nec bene vertat!) mittimus hædos.

It is strange that Dryden did not perceive the beautiful simplicity of these lines. If he had, he would not have written the following ridiculous translation.

——— O Lycidas, at last  
 The time is come I never thought to see,  
 (Strange revolution for my farm and me),  
 When the *grim captain* in a surly tone  
 Cries out, *Pack up, ye rascals, and be gone.*  
*Kick'd out, we set the best face on't we could,*  
 And these two kids, t'appease his angry mood,  
 I bear; of which *the furies give him good.*

from



from a profligate clown in an alehouse, than from a clergyman. Such performances are very detrimental to true piety; they pervert the ignorant, and encourage the profaneness of the scoffer. Nor let it be said, that they make religious truth intelligible to the vulgar: rather say, that they tend to make it appear contemptible. Indeed a preacher, who affects a display of metaphysical learning, or interlards his composition with terms of art or science, or with uncommon words derived from the Greek and Latin, must be little understood by unlettered hearers: but that is a fault which every preacher who has the instruction of his people at heart, and is master of his language and subject, will carefully and easily avoid. For between plainness and meanness of expression there is a very wide difference. Plain words are universally understood, and may be used in every argument, and are especially requisite in all writings addressed to the people. Mean language has no standard, is different in different places, and is applicable to burlesque arguments only. Gulliver's Travels, or the Drapers Letters, are intelligible in every part of England; but the dialects of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Somersetshire, are hardly understood beyond the limits of these provinces. A sermon in Broad Scotch would now seem ridiculous to a Scotch peasant, and withal be less intelligible than one of Swift's or Atterbury's.

Few things in language have a more debasing influence than provincial barbarisms; because we seldom hear them, except from illiterate people, and on familiar occasions\*. Hence, upon the principles here laid down, it might be presumed *a priori*, that to those who thoroughly understand them, they would be apt to appear ludicrous; especially when either the subject, or the condition of the speaker, gave ground to expect a more polite style. And this is so much the case, that in North Britain it is no uncommon thing to see a man obtain a character for jocularitý, merely by speaking the vulgar broad Scotch. To write in that tongue, and yet

\* There is an obvious difference between dialect and pronunciation. A man may be both learned and well-bred, and yet never get the better of his national accent. This may make his speech ungraceful, but will not render it ridiculous. It becomes ridiculous only when it is debased by those vulgarities that convey a mean idea of the speaker. Every Scotchman of taste is ambitious to avoid the solecisms of his native dialect. And this by care and study he may do, and be able, even in familiar discourse, to command such a phraseology as, if committed to writing, would be allowed to be pure English. He may too so far divest himself of his national accent as to be perfectly intelligible, wherever the English language is understood. But the niceties of English pronunciation he cannot acquire, without an early and long residence among English people who speak well. It is however to be hoped, that in the next century this will not be so difficult. From the attention that has of late been paid to the study of the English tongue, the Scots have greatly improved both their pronunciation and their style within these last thirty years.

write

write seriously, is now impossible; such is the effect of *mean* expressions applied to an *important* subject: so that if a Scotch merchant, or man of business, were to write to his countryman in his native dialect, the other would conclude that he was in jest. Not that this language is *naturally* more ridiculous than others. While spoken and written at the court of Scotland, and by the most polite persons in the kingdom, it had all the dignity that any other tongue, equally scanty and uncultivated, could possess; and was a dialect of English, as the Dutch is of German, or the Portuguese of Spanish; that is, it was a language derived from and like another, but subject to its own laws, and regulated by the practice of those who writ and spoke it. But, for more than half a century past, it has, even by the Scots themselves, been considered as the dialect of the vulgar; the learned and polite having, for the most part, adopted the English in its stead;—a preference justly due to the superior genius of that noble language, and the natural effect of the present civil constitution of Great Britain. And now, in Scotland, there is no such thing as a standard of the native tongue; nothing passes for good language, but what is believed to be English; every county thinks its own speech preferable to its neighbour's, without entertaining any partiality for that of the chief town: and the populace of Edinburgh speak

a dialect not more intelligible, nor less disagreeable, to a native of Buchan, than the dialect of Buchan is to a native of Edinburgh.

The greater part of Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* is written in a broad Scotch dialect. The sentiments of that piece are natural, the circumstances interesting; the characters well drawn, well distinguished, and well contrasted; and the fable has more probability than any other pastoral drama I am acquainted with. To an Englishman, who had never conversed with the common people of Scotland, the language would appear only antiquated, obscure, or unintelligible; but to a Scotchman who thoroughly understands it, and is aware of its vulgarity, it appears *ludicrous*; from the contrast between *meanness* of phrase, and *dignity* or *seriousness* of sentiment. This gives a farcical air even to the most affecting parts of the poem; and occasions an impropriety of a peculiar kind, which is very observable in the representation. And accordingly, this play, with all its merit, and with a strong national partiality in its favour, has never given general satisfaction upon the stage.

I have finished a pretty full enumeration of examples; but am very far from supposing it so complete, as to exhibit every species of ludicrous absurdity. Nor am I certain, that the reader will be pleased with my arrangement, or even admit that all my examples

amples have the ludicrous character. But slight inaccuracies, in an inquiry so little connected with practice, will perhaps be overlooked as not very material; especially when it is considered, that the subject, though familiar, is both copious and delicate, and tho' frequently spoken of by philosophers in general terms, has never before been attempted, so far as I know, in the way of induction. At any rate, it will appear from what has been said, that the theory here adopted is plausible at least; and that the philosophy of Laughter is not wholly unsusceptible of method. And they who may think fit to amuse themselves at any time with this speculation, whatever stress they may lay upon my reasoning, will perhaps find their account in my collection of examples. And, provided they substitute a more perfect theory of their own in its stead, I shall not be offended, if by means of these very examples they should find out and demonstrate the imperfection of mine.

## C H A P. III.

Limitations of the preceding doctrine. Incongruity not Ludicrous, I. When customary and common; nor, II. When it excites any powerful emotion in the beholder, as, 1. Moral Disapprobation, 2. Indignation or Disgust, 3. Pity, or, 4. Fear; III. Influence of Good-breeding upon Laughter; IV. Of Similitudes, as connected with this subject; V. Recapitulation.

**T**HAT an opposition of relation and contrariety is often discernible in those things which we call Ludicrous, seems now to be sufficiently proved. But does every such opposition or mixture of contrariety and relation, of suitableness and incongruity, of likeness and dissimilitude, provoke laughter? This requires further disquisition.

I. If an old Greek or Roman were to rise from his grave, and see the human head and shoulders overshadowed with a vast periwig; or were he to contemplate the native hairs of

a fine gentleman arranged in the present form\*, part standing erect, as if their owner were beset with hobgoblins, and part by means of greafe and meal consolidated into paste: he could hardly fail to be struck with the appearance; and I question, whether the features even of Heraclitus himself, or of the younger Cato, would not relax a little upon the occasion. For in this absurd imitation of nature, we have likeness coupled with dissimilitude, and imaginary grace with real deformity, and inconvenience sought after with eagerness, and at considerable expence. Yet in these fashions they who are accustomed to them do not perceive any thing ridiculous. Nay, were we to see a fine lady dressed according to the mode still extant in some old pictures, with her tresses all hanging about her eyes, in distinct and equal portions, like a bunch of candles, and twisted into a hundred strange curls, we should certainly think her a laughable phenomenon; though the same object two centuries ago would have been gazed at with admiration and delight. There are few incongruities to which *custom* will not reconcile us †.

Nay,

\* In the year 1764.

† In the age of James the First, when fashion had consecrated the *Pun* and *Paronomasia*, the hearers of a quibbling preacher, were, I doubt not, both attentive and serious; as the universal prevalence of witticism,

Nay, so wonderfully ductile is the taste of some people, that, in the various revolutions of fashion, they find the same thing *charming* while in vogue, which when obsolete is altogether *frightful*. — Incongruity, therefore, in order to be ludicrous, must be in some measure uncommon.

To this it will be objected, that those ludicrous passages in books, that have been many times laughed at by the same person, do not entirely lose their effect by the fre-

even on solemn occasions, would almost annihilate its ludicrous effect. But it may be doubted, whether any audience in Great Britain would now maintain their gravity, if they were to be entertained with such a sermon, as *Sulton's Caution for the Credulous*; from which, for the reader's amusement, I transcribe the following passages: — “ Here I have *undertaken* one who hath *over-*  
 “ *taken* many, a *Machiavillian*, (or rather a *matchless*  
 “ *villian*), one that professeth himself to be a *friend*,  
 “ when he is indeed a *fiend*. — His greatest *amity* is but  
 “ *dissembled enmity*. — His *Ave* threatens a *va*; and  
 “ therefore listen not to his treacherous *Ave*, but hear-  
 “ ken unto Solomon's *Cave*; and though he speaketh  
 “ favourably, believe him not. — Though I call him  
 “ but a *plain flatterer*, (for I mean to deal very *plainly*  
 “ with him), some compare him to a devil. If he be  
 “ one, these words of Solomon are a *spell* to *expel* this  
 “ devil. — *Wring* not my words, to *wrong* my meaning;  
 “ I go not about to crucifie the *sons*, but the *sins* of  
 “ men. — Some flatter a man for their own private be-  
 “ nefit: — this man's heart thou hast in thy pocket; for  
 “ if thou *find* in *thy purse* to give him presently, he will  
 “ *find* in *his heart* to love thee everlastingly.” *A Caution for the Credulous. By Edw. Sulton, Preacher. quarto. pp. 44. Aberdeen printed, 1629. Edinburgh reprinted, 1696.*



quency of their appearance. But many circumstances concur to perpetuate the agreeable effect of those passages. We forget them in the intervals of reading, and thus they often become almost new to us : — when we read them a second or third time, the remembrance of the former emotion may serve to heighten the present ; — when we read them in company, or hear them read, our emotions are enforced by sympathy ; — and all this while the wit or humour remains the same, unimpaired and unaffected by accidental associations. — Whereas, on the other hand, there are many circumstances that tend in time to obliterate, or at least to soften, what at first might seem ridiculous in modes of conversation or dress. For things are not always agreeable or disagreeable in proportion to their intrinsic beauty or deformity ; much will depend on extraneous and accidental connections : and, as men who live in society do daily acquire new companions, by whom their manners are in some degree tinctured ; so whatever is driven about in the tide of human affairs is daily made a part of some new assemblage, and daily contracts new qualities from those things that chance associates with it. A vast periwig is in itself perhaps somewhat ridiculous ; but the person who wears it may be a venerable character. These two objects, being constantly united, derive new qualities from each other : — the wig may at first

raise a smile at the expence of the wearer, but the wearer will at last render even his wig respectable. The fine lady may have a thousand charms, every one of which is more than sufficient to make us fond of the little irregularities of her temper, and much more to reconcile us to any awkward disposition of her ringlets or apparel. And the fine gentleman, whose hair in its economy so little resembles that of Milton's Adam\*, may be, what no ungracefulness of shape or feature will ever expose to ridicule, a faithful friend, a valiant foldier, an agreeable companion, or a dutiful son. — Our natural love of society, the various and substantial pleasures we derive from that source, and our proneness to imitation, not to mention the power of custom, soon reconcile us to the manners of those with whom we live; and therefore cannot fail to recommend their external appearance.

All the nations in Europe, and perhaps all the nations on earth, are, in some particulars of dress or deportment, mutually ridiculous to one another; and to the vulgar of each nation, or to those who have never been from home, nor conversed with strangers, the peculiarities of foreign behaviour are

\* ——— hyacinthin locks

Round from his parted forelock manly hung

Clustering, but not beneath his shoulders broad.

*Paradise Lost, book 4.*

most

most apt to appear ludicrous. Persons who, by travel or extensive acquaintance, are become familiar with foreign manners, see nothing ridiculous in them: and it is therefore reasonable, that a disposition to laugh at the dress and gestures of a stranger (provided these be unaffected on his part) should be taken for a mark of rusticity, as well as of ill-nature. Tragedies written in rhyme, or pronounced in Recitative, may be thought ridiculous, when one has seen but little of them; but it is easy to give a reason why they should be highly and seriously interesting in France and Italy. That cannot be ludicrous, that must, on the contrary, be the object of admiration, to which we have been accustomed to annex ideas of festivity and leisure, of beauty and magnificence, which we have always heard spoken of as a matter of universal concern, and with which from our infancy we have been acquainted.

May we not, then, set it down, as a character of Ludicrous absurdity, that it is in some degree *new and surprisng*? Witticisms that appear to be studied give offence, instead of entertainment: and nothing sets off a merry tale to so great advantage as an unpromising simplicity of style and manner. By virtue of this negative accomplishment, men of moderate talents have been known to contribute more to the mirth of the company, than those could ever do, who, with superior powers of genius, were more artful in their

their language, and more animated in their pronounciation. Concifenefs, too, when we intend a laughable conclufion, is an effential requisite in telling a ftory; nor fhould any man attempt to be diffufe in humorous narrative, but he whole wit and eloquence are very great. A joke is always the worfe for being expected: the longer it is withheld after we are made to look for it, the more will its volatile fpirit lofe by evaporation. The greateft mafterpieces in ludicrous writing would become infipid, if too frequently perufed; *decies repetita placebit* is a character that belongs to few of them: and I believe every admirer of Cervantes and Fielding would purchafe at a confiderable price the pleafure of reading Tom Jones and Don Quixote for the firft time. It is true, a good comedy, well performed, may entertain the fame perfon for many fucceffive evenings; but fome varieties are always expected, and do generally take place, in each new representation; and though the wit and the bufinefs of every fcene fhould come at laft to be diftinctly remembered, there will ftill be fomething in the art of the player, which one would wifh to fee repeated.

II. But as every furprifing incongruity is not ludicrous, we muft purfue our fpeculations a little further.

I. A more ftriking abfurdity there is not in the whole univerfe, than a vitious man. His frame and faculties are human: his mo-

ral nature, originally inclined to rectitude, is sadly perverted, and applied to purposes not less unfuitable to humanity, than dancing is to a bear, or a sword and snuff-box to a monkey. He judges of things, not by their proper standard, nor as they are in themselves, but as they appear through the medium of his own variable and artificial appetites; as the clown is said to have applied his candle to the sun-dial to see how the night went. He overlooks and loses real good, in order to attain that of which he knows not whether it be good, or whether it be attainable; like the dog in the fable, losing the substance by catching at a shadow. He justifies his conduct to his own mind, by arguments whereof he sees the fallacy; like the thief endeavouring to enrich himself by stealing out of his own pocket. He purposes to take up and reform, whenever his appetites are fully gratified; like the rustic, whose plan was, to wait till the water of the river should run by, and then pass over dry-shod. He attempts what is beyond his reach, and is ruined by the attempt; like the frog that burst by endeavouring to blow herself up to the size of an ox. — In a word, more blunders and absurdities, than ever the imitators of Esop ascribed to the beasts, or Joe Millar to the Scots and Irish, might easily be traced out in the conduct of the wicked man. And yet Vice, however it may *surprise* by its novelty or enormity, is  
by

by no means an object of laughter, even to those who perceive in it all the absurdities I have specified. We pity, and in some cases we abhor, the perpetrator; but our mind must be depraved like his own, if we laugh at him.

But can pity, abhorrence, and risibility, be excited by the same object, and at the same time? Can the painful passions of hatred and horror, and the pleasurable feeling that accompanies laughter, exist at one and the same instant in a well-informed mind? Can that amuse and delight us by its absurdity, which our moral principle, armed with the authority of Heaven, declares to be shameful, and worthy of punishment? It is impossible: emotions, so different in their nature, and so unequal in power, cannot dwell together; the weaker must give place to the stronger. And which is the weaker? — moral disapprobation, or the ludicrous sentiment? Are the pleasures of wit and humour a sufficient counterpoise to the pangs of a wounded spirit? Are a jest and a generous action equally respectable? In affliction, in sickness, at the hour of death, which is the better comforter, an approving conscience, or a buffoon? — the remembrance of a well-spent life, or of our connections with a witty society? — The glow-worm and the sun are not less susceptible of comparison. — It would seem then, that those absurdities in ourselves or others, which provoke the dis-

approbation

approbation of the moral faculty, cannot be ludicrous; because in a sound mind they give rise to emotions inconsistent with, and far more powerful than, that whereof laughter is the outward indication.

But what do you say of those *Comedies* and *Satires*, which put us out of conceit with our vices, by exposing them to laughter? Such performances, surely cannot be all unnatural; and if they are not, may not vice be made a ludicrous object? — Our follies, and vices of less enormity, may, I grant, be exhibited in very laughable colours; and if we can be prevailed on to see them in a *ridiculous* light, that is, both to *laugh at* and to *despise* them, our reformation may be presumed to be in some forwardness: and hence the utility of *ridicule*, as an instrument of moral culture. — But if we only *laugh at* our faults, without *despising* them, that is, if they appear *ludicrous* only, and not *ridiculous*, it is to be feared, that we shall be more inclined to love than to hate them: and hence the imperfection of those writings, in which human follies are made the subject of mere pleasantry and amusement. — I cannot admit, that to a sound mind undisguised immorality can ever cease to be disgusting; tho' I allow, that the guilty person may possess qualities sufficient to render him agreeable upon the whole. This indeed happens too often in life; and it is this that makes bad company so fatally ensnaring. This too, the

Comic Muse, laying aside the character of a moralist, and assuming that of a pimp, has too often introduced upon the stage. But, however profligate a poet may be, we are not to suppose, that downright wickedness can ever in itself be a laughable object to any decent assembly of rational beings. The *Provoked Wife*, the *Old Bachelor*, the *Beggar's Opera*, are dangerous plays no doubt, and scandalously immoral; but it is the wit and the humour, not the villany, of Brute, Belmour, and Macheath, that makes the audience merry; and Vanburgh, Congreve, and Gay, are blameable, not because they have made beastliness, robbery, lying, and adultery, ludicrous, (for that I believe was not in their power), but because they adorn their respective reprobates with engaging qualities to seduce others into imitation. — But may not criminal adventures be so disguised and misrepresented, as to extort a smile even from a man of good principles? This may be, no doubt; for, as the forms of falsehood are infinite, it is not easy to say, how many strange things may be affected by misrepresentation. While the moral faculty is inactive or neuter, the ludicrous sentiment may operate; but to have a just sense of the enormity of a crime, and at the same time to laugh at it, seems impossible, or at least unnatural: — and therefore, we may venture to repeat, that moral disapprobation is a more powerful emotion than laughter; and consequently,



consequently, that both, as their natures are inconsistent, cannot at the same time prevail in a well-informed mind. “ They are fools “ who laugh at sin ;” — and, whatever may be the practice of profligates, or of good men under the influence of a temporary infatuation, the common feelings of mankind do not warrant so gross an impropriety.

As to *Satire*, we must observe, that it is of two sorts, the Comic and the Serious ; that human foibles are the proper objects of the former, and vices and crimes of the latter ; and that it ought to be the aim of the satirist to make those ridiculous, and these detestable. I know not how it comes to pass, that the Comic Satire should be so much in vogue ; but I find that the generality of critics are all for the moderation and smiling graces of the courtly Horace, and exclaim against the vehemence and vindictive zeal of the unmannerly Juvenal. They may as well blame Sophocles for not adopting the style of Aristophanes, and insist that Cicero should have arraigned Verres in the language of Anacreon. Nor do Horace and Juvenal admit of comparison in this respect \* ; any more

\* Nor indeed in any respect. Different in their views, and in their subjects, they differ no less in style. That of Horace (in his satires) is indeed superlatively elegant, but easy, familiar, and apparently artless. The style of Juvenal is elaborate, harmonious, vehement, poetical, and often sublime.

than a chapter of the Tale of a Tub can be compared with one of the Saturday papers in the Spectator. These poets had different views, and took different subjects; and therefore it was right that there should be a difference in their manner of writing. Had Juvenal made a jest of the crimes of his contemporaries, all the world would have called him a bad writer and a bad man. And had Horace, with the severity of Juvenal, attacked the impertinence of coxcombs, the pedantry of the Stoics, the fastidiousness of luxury, and the folly of avarice, he would have proved himself ignorant of the nature of things, and even of the meaning of his own precept :

———— Adfit

Regula, peccatis quæ pænas irroget æquas,  
Ne scutica dignum horribili sectere flagello \*.

That neither Horace nor Juvenal ever endeavoured to make us laugh at crimes, I will not affirm; but for every indiscretion of this kind they are to be condemned, not imitated. And this is not the general character of their satire. Horace laughed at the

\* Let rules be fix'd that may our rage contain,  
And punish faults with a proportion'd pain :  
And do not slay him, who deserves alone  
A whipping for the fault that he has done.

*Creech.*

follies

follies and foibles of mankind ; so far he did well. But Juvenal (if his indecencies had died with himself) might, as a moral satirist, be said to have done better. Fired with honest indignation at the unexampled degeneracy of his age ; and, disdainng that tameness of expression and fervility of sentiment, which in some cases are infallible marks of a dastardly soul, he dragged Vice from the bower of pleasure and from the throne of empire, and exhibited her to the world, not in a ludicrous attitude, but in her genuine form ; a form of such loathsome ugliness, and hideous distortion, as cannot be viewed without horror.

We repeat therefore, that wickedness is no object of laughter ; the disapprobation of conscience, and the ludicrous sentiment, being emotions inconsistent in their nature, and very unequal in power. In fact, the latter emotion is generally weak, and never should be strong ; while the former in every mind ought to be, and in every sound mind is, the most powerful principle of the human constitution.

2. Further : When sacred things are profaned by meanness of allusion and language, the incongruity will not force a smile from a well-disposed person, except it surprise him in an unguarded moment. I could quote, from Blackmore and Rutherford, thoughts as incongruous as any that ever disgraced literature, but which are too shocking to raise  
any

any other emotions than horror and indignation. From an author far more respectable I shall give one instance, to show how debasing it is, even to a great genius, to become a flatterer.

Falſe heroes, made by flattery ſo,  
 Heaven can ſtrike out, like ſparkles, at a blow;  
 But, ere a prince is to perfection brought,  
 He coſts Omnipotence a ſecond thought:  
 With toil and ſweat,  
 With hardening cold and forming heat,  
 The Cyclops did their work repeat,  
 Before th' impenetrable ſhield was wrought,  
 &c. \*

Anger too is generally, while it laſts, a preſervative againſt riſible impreſſions; whence great laughers are ſuppoſed to be good-natured. While all England laughed at the heroes of the *Dunciad*, Colley Cibber and his brethren were, I dare ſay, perfectly ſerious. And if the gravity of Edmund Curll was overcome by that "account of his poiſoning," which no other perſon's gravity could ever withſtand, he muſt have poſſeſſed a great deal of philoſophy or of inſenſibility. Socrates, in the Athenian theatre, joining in the laugh that Ariſtophanes had raiſed againſt him, is ſpoken of by old authors as a ſingular inſtance of ſelf-command: which I mention, not with a view to compare the ſage with

\* Dryden's *Threnodia Auguſtalis*.

the bookseller, but to show, that anger and laughter were supposed to have the same influence on each other two thousand years ago, which they are found to have at this present time.

3. Even pity alone is, for the most part, of power sufficient to controul risibility. To one who could divest himself of that affection, a wooden leg might perhaps appear ludicrous; from the striking contrast of incongruity and similitude; — and in fact we find that Butler has made both himself and his readers merry with an implement of this sort that pertained to the expert Crowdero; and that Smollet has taken the same freedom, for the same purpose, with his friend Lieutenant Hatchway. But he who forgets humanity so far, as to smile at such a memorial of misfortune in a living person, will be blamed by every good man. We expect, because from experience we know it is natural, that pity should prevail over the ludicrous emotion.

“ Many a Scotch Presbyterian (says Hut-  
 “ cheson, in his *Reflections upon Laughter*)  
 “ has been put to it to preserve his gravity,  
 “ upon hearing the application of Scripture  
 “ made by his countryman Dr Pitcairn, as  
 “ he observed a croud in the streets about  
 “ a mason, who had fallen along with his  
 “ scaffold, and was overwhelmed with the  
 “ ruins of the chimney which he had been  
 “ building, and which fell immediately af-  
 “ ter

“ter the fall of the poor mafon: Bleffed  
 “are the dead which die in the Lord, for  
 “they reft from their labours, and their  
 “works follow them.” — For the honour of  
 the learned phyfician’s memory, I hope the  
 ftory is not true. Such wantonnefs of im-  
 piety, and fuch barbarity of infult, is no  
 object of laughter, but of horror. And I  
 confefs, I fhould have no good opinion of  
 any Prefbyterian, or of any perfon, who  
 could find it difficult to preferve his gravity  
 on hearing it told.

4. Fear is a paffion, which would I think  
 on almoft any occafion repreffs laughter. To  
 conceal one’s fear, one might feign a laugh;  
 and any paffion in extreme may produce a  
 fimilar convulfion: but nobody laughs at  
 that which makes him ferioufly afraid, how-  
 ever incongruous its appearance may be. A  
 friend of mine dreamed that he faw the de-  
 vil, and awoke in a great fright. He defcri-  
 bed the phantafm very minutely; and fure  
 a more ridiculous one was never imagined;  
 but, inftead of laughter, his countenance be-  
 trayed every fymptom of horror; for the  
 dream had made a ftrong impreffion, nor  
 could he for many months think of it with-  
 out uneafinefs. It is ftrange, that the com-  
 mon people, who are fo much afraid of the  
 devil, fhould fancy him to be of a ludicrous  
 figure, with horns, a tail, and cloven feet,  
 united to the human form. Sir Thomas  
 Brown, with no little plaufibility, derives  
 2 this

this conceit from the Rabbins \*. But the Romans, from their ascribing unaccountable fear to the agency of Pan, whose supposed figure was the same, appear to have been possessed with a similar superstition, in whatever way they came by it. Satyrs, however, were believed to be merry beings; always piping and dancing, and frisking about, cracking their jokes, and throwing themselves into antic attitudes; and indeed when they are introduced in a picture, they generally convey somewhat of a ludicrous impression, as the sight of such an animal, supposed to be harmless, could hardly fail to do.

III. Good-breeding lays many restraints upon laughter, and upon all other emotions that display themselves externally. And this leads me to speak of those refinements in wit and humour, which take place in society, according as mankind improve in polite behaviour.

Lord Froth, in the play called the Double Dealer †, and Lord Chesterfield, in a book of letters which some think might have borne the same appellation, declaim vehemently against laughter: — “there is nothing more  
“ unbecoming a person of quality, than to  
“ laugh; ’tis such a vulgar thing; every

\* Pseudodoxia Epidemica, book 5. chap. 21.

† Act 1. scene 4.

“body can laugh.” Influenced by a doctrine of so high authority, many of my readers may, I am afraid, have been inclined to think hardly of me, for analysing vulgar witticisms, and inquiring into the nature of a phenomenon, which can no longer show its face in genteel company. And therefore it may be proper for me to say a word or two in defence, first of myself, and secondly of my subject.

In behalf of myself I can only plead, that Laughter, however unfashionable, is a real and a natural expression of a certain human emotion, or inward feeling; and has been so, for any thing I know to the contrary, ever since the days of Adam; that therefore it is as liable to the cognizance of philosophy, as any other natural fact; and that we are to judge of it, rather from its unrestrained energies, than from the appearances it may assume under the control of affectation or delicacy. The foot of a Chinese beauty is whiter, no doubt, and prettier, than that of a Scotch highlander; yet I would advise those who are curious to know the parts and proportions of that limb, to contemplate the clown rather than the lady. To be master of one's own temper, is a most desirable thing; and much more pleasant it is, to live with such as are so, than among those who, without caution or disguise, speak, and look, and act, according to the impulse of passion: but the philosopher who would analyse anger,



ger, pride, jealousy, or any other violent emotion, will do well to take its phenomena rather from the latter than from the former. Just so, in tracing out the cause of laughter, I did not think it necessary or expedient to confine my observation to those pleasantries which the *sentimental* critic would honour with a simper: it suited my purpose better to attend to examples; which, whether really laughed at or no, the generality of mankind would acknowledge to be laughable.

That all men are not equally inclined to laughter; and that some may be found, who rarely indulge in it themselves, and actually dislike it in others, cannot be denied. But they are greatly mistaken, who suppose this character to be the effect of good-breeding, or peculiar to high life. In the cottage you will find it, as well as in the drawing room. Nor is profuse laughter peculiar to low life: it is a weakness incident to all stations; though I believe, that among the *wiser* sort, both of clowns and of quality, it may be less common.

But the present inquiry does not so much regard laughter itself, as that pleasurable emotion or sentiment, whereof laughter is the outward sign, and which may be intensely felt by those who do not laugh at all; even as the person who never weeps may yet be very tender-hearted. Nay as the keenest and most rational sorrow is not the most apt to express itself in tears; so the most admi-

rable performances in wit and humour are not perhaps the most laughable; admiration being one of those powerful emotions that occasionally engross the whole soul, and suspend the exercise of its faculties.—And therefore, whatever judgement the reader may have formed concerning the lawfulness, expediency, or propriety, of this visible and audible convulsion called Laughter; my account of the cause of that internal emotion which generally gives rise to it, may be allowed to be pardonable, if it shall be found to be just. Nor does Lord Chesterfield, as I remember, object to this emotion, nor to a smile as the outward expression of it, so long as the said smile is not suffered to degenerate into an open laugh.

Good-breeding is the art of pleasing those with whom we converse. Now we cannot please others, if we either show them what is unpleasing in ourselves, or give them reason to think that we perceive what is unpleasing in them. Every emotion, therefore, that would naturally arise from bad qualities in us, or from the view of them in others, and all those emotions in general which our company may think too violent, and cannot sympathise with, nor partake in, good-breeding requires that we suppress. Laughter, which is either too profuse or too obstreperous, is an emotion of this kind: and therefore, a man of breeding will be careful not to laugh much longer, or much oftener than others;

others; nor to laugh at all, except where it is probable, that the jest may be equally relished by the company. — These, and other restraints peculiar to polished life, have, by some writers, been represented as productive of fraud, hypocrisy, and a thousand other crimes, from which the honest, open, un-  
 designing savage is supposed to be entirely free. But, were this a fit place for stating the comparison, we could easily prove, that the restraints of good-breeding render society comfortable, and, by suppressing the outward energy of intemperate passions, tend not a little to suppress those passions themselves: while the unbridled liberty of savage life gives full play to every turbulent emotion, keeps the mind in continual uproar, and disqualifies it for those improvements and calm delights, that result from the exercise of the rational and moral faculties.

But to return. The more we are accustomed to any set of objects, the greater delicacy of discernment we acquire in comparing them together, and estimating their degree of excellence. By studying many pictures one may become a judge of painting; by attending to the ornaments and proportions of many buildings, one acquires a taste in architecture; by practising music, we improve our sense of harmony; by reading many poems, we learn to distinguish the good from the bad. In like manner, by being conversant in works of wit and humour,  
 and

and by joining in polite conversation, we refine our taste in ridicule, and come to undervalue those homelier jokes that entertain the vulgar. What improves individuals will in time improve nations. Plautus abounds in pleasantries that were the delight of his own and of the following age, but which, at the distance of one hundred and fifty years, Horace scruples not to censure for their inurbanity \*. And we find not a few even in Shakespeare (notwithstanding the great superiority of his genius) at which a critic of these days would be less inclined to laugh, than to shake his head. Nay in the time of Charles the Second, many things passed upon the English stage for excellent humour, which would now be intolerable. — And thus it is, that we are enabled to judge of the politeness of nations, from the delicacy of their Comic writers; and of the breeding and literature of individual men, from their turn of humour, from their favourite jokes and stories, and from the very sound, duration, and frequency, of their laughter.

The conversation of the common people, though not so smooth, nor so pleasing, as that of the better sort, has more of the wildness and strong expression of nature. The common people speak and look what they think, bluster and threaten when they are angry, affect no sympathies which they do

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 270.—275.

not feel, and when offended are at no pains to conceal their dissatisfaction. They laugh when they perceive any thing ludicrous, without much deference to the sentiments of their company; and, having little relish for delicate humour, because they have been but little used to it, they amuse themselves with such pleasantries as in the higher ranks of life would offend by its homeliness. Yet may it be ludicrous notwithstanding? as those passions in a clown or savage may be natural, which in the polite world men are very careful to suppress.

IV. Tropes and Figures introduce into serious writing a variety of disproportionate images; which, however, do not provoke laughter, when they are so contrived as to raise some other emotion of greater authority. To illustrate this by examples taken from every species of trope and figure, is not necessary, and would be tedious. I shall confine my remarks to the Similitude or Comparifon; which is a very common figure, and contributes, more perhaps than any other, to render language emphatical, picturesque, and affecting to the fancy.

Every Similitude implies two things; the idea to be illustrated, which I call the *principal idea*; and the object alluded to, for the purpose of illustration. Now if between these two there be a considerable inequality; if the one be mean and the other dignified, or if the one be of much greater dignity than  
the

the other; there may be reason to apprehend (supposing our theory just) that, by their appearing in one assemblage, a mixture of relation and contrariety may be produced, sufficient to render the comparison ludicrous; — of relation, arising from the likeness, — of contrariety, arising from the disproportion. And that this is often the case, we have seen already. — But when Homer compares a great army to a flight of cranes, Hector to a rock, Ajax to an ass, and Ulysses covered with leaves to a bit of live coal raked up among embers, the similitudes, for all their incongruity, are quite serious; at least they convey no Risible impression to a reader of taste when perusing the poem. By attending a little to this matter, we shall perhaps be able to throw new light on our argument.

Similitudes, ranged according to their connection with the present subject, are distinguishable into three classes. 1. One sublime or dignified object may be likened to another that is more sublime, or more dignified. 2. An object comparatively mean may be likened to one that is sublime. 3. An object comparatively sublime may be likened to one that is mean.

1. If one great or dignified object is likened to another that is greater or more dignified, as when Homer compares Achilles in arms to the moon, to a comet, to the sun,

and to a god \*, our admiration is evidently heightened, and the principal idea improved, by the comparison. But that which we greatly admire we seldom laugh at in any circumstances, and perhaps never, when, together with admiration, it infuses into the soul that sweet and elevating astonishment which attends the perception of those objects or ideas that we denominate sublime. The emotion inspired by the view of sublimity is also in itself more powerful than that which gives rise to laughter; at least in all minds that are not weak by nature, nor depraved by habit. No person of a sound mind ever laughed the first time he raised his eyes to contemplate the inside of St Paul's cupola: nor, in performing any of the solemn offices of his function, would a judge, a magistrate, or a clergyman, be excused, if he were to give way to laughter. In vain would he plead, that his mind was at that moment struck with a ludicrous conceit, or with the recollection of a merry story: we should say, that thoughts of a higher nature *ought* to have restrained him; — an idea which would not occur to us, if we were not conscious of the natural subordination of the risible propensity. — An object not absolutely mean is rendered sublime in some degree, by asso-

\* Iliad, xix.

ciation with a sublime idea. A *Pibroch* \*, which in every other country would appear a jumble of unmeaning sounds, may communicate sublime impressions to a highlander of Scotland; not so much because he understands its modulation, as because it conveys to his mind the elevating ideas of danger, and courage, and armies, and military service. And let me take this opportunity to observe, that, in like manner, a thing not ludicrous in itself may occasion laughter, when it conveys to the mind any ludicrous idea related to it by custom, or by any other associating principle. It can hardly be said, that the braying of an ass is in itself more ludicrous (though perhaps it may be more dissonant) than the neigh of a horse; yet one may be inclined to smile when one hears it, by its bringing to mind the other qualities of that sluggish animal, with which the wags

\* A *Pibroch* is a species of tune peculiar, I think, to the highlands and western isles of Scotland. It is performed on a bagpipe, and differs totally from all other music. Its rhythm is so irregular, and its notes, especially in the quick movement, so mixed and huddled together, that a stranger finds it almost impossible to reconcile his ear to it, so as to perceive its modulation. Some of these *Pibrochs*, being intended to represent a battle, begin with a grave motion resembling a march; then gradually quicken into the onset; run off with noisy confusion, and turbulent rapidity, to imitate the conflict and pursuit; then swell into a few flourishes of triumphant joy; and perhaps close with the wild and slow wailings of a funeral procession.



of both ancient and modern times have often made themselves merry. And hence it is, that men of lively fancy, especially if they have been accustomed to attend to the laughable side of things, are apt to smile at that in which others neither perceive, nor can imagine any thing ridiculous.

2. An object comparatively mean is often likened to one that is sublime: in which case it may require great address in the poet to maintain the majesty of Epic or Didactic composition. Similitudes of this kind, if very disproportionate, are not to be hazarded, while the principal idea retains its primitive meanness. The poet must first employ all his powers of harmony and language, to adorn and dignify it, by interesting the affections of his reader: a branch of the poetic art, which, as I have elsewhere observed \*, is universal in its application, and may give life and pathos to mere descriptions of external nature, as well as to the most sublime efforts of the Epic or Tragic Muse.

In the art of conferring dignity upon objects comparatively mean, Virgil excels all poets whatever. By a tenderness of sentiment irresistibly captivating; by a perpetual series of the most pleasing, picturesque, and romantic imagery; by the most affecting di-

\* Essay on Poetry and Music, part 1. chap. 3.

gressions; and by a propriety, beauty, and sweetness of language, peculiar to himself, and unattainable by all others; he makes his way to the heart of his readers, whatever be the subject: and so prepares them for allusions and similitudes, which in the hand of an ordinary poet might appear even ridiculously inadequate; but which, by his management, give an air of grandeur to the meanest things described in his divine *Georgic*. The very mouse that undermines the threshing-floor, he renders an animal of importance. For his bees we are interested, as for a commonwealth of reasonable creatures. He compares them in one place to the Cyclops forging thunder. Yet, inadequate and even ludicrous as the comparison must appear when it is thus mentioned, it has no such effect as it appears in the poem. The reader is already so prepossessed and elevated with those ideas of dignity that adorn the subject, that he is more disposed to admire, than to laugh or cavil.

Mr John Philips had a happy talent in the *Mock-Heroic*, but was not equally fortunate in serious poetry. In his *Cyder*, he endeavours, in imitation of Virgil, to raise the subject by sublime allusions; but is apt to bring them in too abruptly, and before he has given sufficient importance to the principal idea. Nor has he any pretensions to that sweetness and melody of style, which intoxicate the readers of the Mantuan poet, and  
prepare

prepare them for any impression he is pleased to convey. And hence the language of Philips often takes the appearance of bombast; and some of his comparisons, instead of raising admiration by their greatness, tend rather to provoke a smile by their incongruity.

The apple's outward form  
Delectable the witless swain beguiles,  
Till, with a writhen mouth and spattering noise,  
He tastes the bitter morsel, and rejects  
Disrelish'd. Not with less surprize, than when  
Embattled troops with flowing banners pass  
Through flowery meads delighted, nor distrust  
The smiling surface; whilst the cavern'd ground,  
With grain incentive stored, by sudden blaze  
Bursts fatal, and involves the hopes of war  
In fiery whirls; full of victorious thoughts,  
Torn and dismember'd, they aloft expire.

Had Virgil been to dignify this surprize by a magnificent allusion, he would not have degraded the principal idea by low images, (like those signified by the words *writhen mouth* \* and *spattering noise*); but would

\* This very *writhen mouth* seems to be an allusion to Virgil;

At sapor indicium faciet manifestus, et ora  
Tristia tentantum sensu torquebit amaror.

*Georg.* ii. 247.

— but it is to a part of Virgil, where simplicity is more studied than elevation.

have

have employed all his art to raise it to such elevation as might make the disproportionate greatness of the object alluded to less observable \*. — Thomson has imitated Virgil's manner with much better skill, in that beautiful passage of his Autumn †, too long for a quotation, where he compares a hive of bees suffocated with brimstone to a city swallowed up by an earthquake.

In the Mock-Epic, where ridicule is often raised by exaggerating similitudes, care is taken to introduce the pompous comparison, while the principal idea appears in all its native insignificance; and sometimes the ridicule is heightened by a dash of bombast, or by a trifling circumstance unexpectedly in-

\* In the third Georgic, Virgil, speaking of the method of training steers to the plough and waggon, is at pains to dignify the subject by elegant language; but his figures are apposite, and not at all too lofty for the occasion:

Tu quos ad *studium* atque usum formabis agrestem  
 Jam vitulos *hortare*, viamque insiste domandi,  
 Dum faciles *animi juvenum*, dum mobilis ætas, &c.  
Vers. 163.

Dryden, in his translation, wants to rise to higher elegance by means of bolder figures, which, however, being ill-chosen and ill-prepared, give a ludicrous air to the whole passage. He speaks of *sending the calf to school*, of forming his mind with *moral precepts*, and instructing him in husbandry, before he is perverted by *bad example*.

† Autumn, vers. 1170.

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troduced in the middle of affected solemnity.

But, in judging of similitudes in all serious writing, it is necessary to attend to the point of likeness on which the comparison turns: for two things may resemble each other in one particular, which in all others are very unlike; and therefore a similitude may, to an inattentive reader, appear incongruous, which is really proper and adequate. Those critics who blame Virgil for the simile of the Cyclops above mentioned, would do well to consider, that, though there be no resemblance between a bee and a huge one-eyed giant, in the size and frame of their bodies, and as little between their respective employments and manufactures, there may, however, be a resemblance between them in other things. The cyclops are eager to have the thunderbolt forged; the bees may be as eager in their way to fill their cells with honey: — the art of thunder-making employs a number of hands, each of whom has his particular department; and this also holds true of bees employed in the business of the hive. Now it is on account of their similarity in these two respects \*, that the poet compares them; and in these two respects they certainly may be compared. But I allow, that, in serious writing, a similitude of this kind ought not to be attempted, but by an author of the very first rank; and

\* See Virg. Geor. iv. 176.

therefore,

therefore, though I vindicate Virgil, I think it extremely hazardous to imitate him. And I am aware of the truth of part of the following remark of Pope, which I quote at length, (though some expressions in it do not perfectly coincide with the foregoing reasonings), because it seems to me to throw light on the present subject. “ The use of the  
 “ grand style on little subjects is not only  
 “ ludicrous, but a sort of transgression against the rules of proportion and mechanics : it is using a vast force to lift a  
 “ feather. I believe it will be found a just  
 “ observation, that the low actions of life  
 “ cannot be put into a figurative style without being ridiculous ; but things natural  
 “ can. Metaphors raise the latter into dignity, as we see in the Georgics ; but  
 “ throw the former into ridicule, as in the  
 “ Lutrín. I think this may very well be accounted for : laughter implies censure ;  
 “ inanimate and irrational beings are not objects of censure ; and therefore they may  
 “ be elevated as much as you please, and no  
 “ ridicule follows : but when rational beings are represented above their real character, it becomes ridiculous in art, because it is vicious in morality. The bees  
 “ in Virgil, were they rational beings, would  
 “ be ridiculous by having their actions and  
 “ manners represented on a level with creatures so superior as men ; since it would

“ imply folly or pride, which are the proper  
 “ objects of ridicule \*.”

3. A similitude may imply an incongruous assemblage, when an object comparatively sublime is likened to one that is mean. Homer and Virgil compare heroes, not only to beasts, but even to things inanimate, without raising a smile by the contrast. And the reason, as given already, is, that in these similitudes there is something which either takes off our attention from the incongruity, or raises within us an emotion more powerful than this of laughter.

First, the quality that occasions the comparison may be in both objects so adequate, so similar, and so striking, as to take off our attention from the incongruity of the assemblage, or even to remove from the comparison, when attentively considered, every incongruous appearance. Had Homer likened Paris to a horse, because he was good-natured and docile; Ajax to an ass, because he was dull; and Achilles to a lion, because of his long yellow hair; the allusions would probably have been ludicrous. But he likens Paris to a pampered horse †, because of his wantonness, swiftness, and luxurious life; Ajax to an ass ‡, because he is said to have been as much superior to the assault of the

\* Pope's Postscript to the Odyssy.

† Iliad, vi.

‡ Iliad, xi.

Trojans, as that animal is to the blows of children; and Achilles to a lion\*, on account of his strength, fierceness, and impetuosity. Hector he compares to a rock tumbling from the top of a mountain †, because while he moved he was irresistible, and when he stopped immovable; qualities not more conspicuous in the hero, than in the stone. Milton likens Satan to a whale ‡; not because the one spouts salt water, as the other is vulgarly supposed to breathe out sulphureous fire, but because of his enormous size: and, to lessen the incongruity, if any should be supposed to remain, the poet is at great pains to raise our idea of the whale's magnitude:

Him haply flumbering on the Norway foam  
 The pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff  
 Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,  
 With fixed anchor in his scaly rhind,  
 Moors by his side. —

But, secondly, it may happen, even in the higher poetry, that the compared qualities shall present an incongruous association, to the disadvantage of the principal idea. In this case, as there is an opposition, of greatness in the principal idea, and meanness in the object alluded to, it will be somewhat

\* Iliad, xx.

† Iliad, xiii.

‡ Par. Lost, book i.



difficult to maintain true Epic dignity. It may, however, be done, by blending with the description of the mean object some interesting circumstance, to take off the attention from the incongruity, and fix it on something important or serious. Ulysses, going to sleep, covered over with leaves, after swimming out naked from a shipwreck, is compared by Homer to a bit of live coal preserved by a peasant in a heap of embers :

As some poor peasant, fated to reside  
 Remote from neighbours, in a forest wide,  
 Studious to save what human wants require,  
 In embers heap'd preserves the seeds of fire ;  
 Hid in dry foliage thus Ulysses lies,  
 Till Pallas pour'd soft slumber on his eyes \*.

This simile, when we attend to the point of likeness, will be found to have sufficient propriety ; the resemblance being obvious, between a man almost deprived of life, and a brand almost extinguished ; between the foliage that defends Ulysses from cold, and probably from death, during the night, and the embers that keep alive the seeds of fire : yet if dressed up by a genius like Butler, it might assume a ludicrous appearance, from the disproportionate nature of the things compared. But Homer, with great delicacy, draws off the reader's attention to the pea-

\* Odyss. lib. 5.

fant's solitary dwelling on the extremity of a frontier, where he had no neighbours to assist him in renewing his fire, if by any accident it should go out. — The poet is less delicate on another occasion, when he likens the same hero, tossing in his bed, and sleepless through desire to be avenged on the plunderers of his household, to a man employed “in broiling on a great fire a stomach full of fat and blood, and often turning it, because he is impatient to have it roasted \*.” This image is unpleasing and despicable; and the comparison must appear ridiculous to a modern reader: — though Boileau pleads, that the viand here mentioned was esteemed a great delicacy by the ancients; though Eustathius seems to think, that a low similitude might in this place very well suit the beggarly condition of Ulysses; and though, in the opinion of Mons. Dacier, the bag stuffed with fat and blood might, in Homer's days, convey a religious, and consequently an important, idea.

When the object alluded to is pleasing in itself, and the description elegant, we are apt to overlook the incongruity of a similitude, even where the disproportion is very great; the ludicrous emotion being as it were suppressed by our admiration of the poetry, or the littleness of the object compensated by its beauty. That famous passage in Virgil,

\* Odyss. xx.

where Amata, roaming up and down, from the agitation of her mind, and the impulse of a demon, is compared to a top whipped about by boys, has been called fustian by some critics, and burlesque by others \*. In my opinion it is neither. The propriety in point of likeness is undeniable. The object alluded to, though in itself void of dignity, is however pleasing; and receives elevation

\* Demetrius Phalereus observes, that “Elegance of language, by exciting admiration, makes the ridiculous disappear;” and adds, “that to express a ludicrous sentiment in fine language is like dressing an ape in fine cloaths. The words of Sappho, (continues he), when Beauty is her theme, are sweet and beautiful; as in her poems on Love, on Air, and on the Halcyon. Indeed all the beauties of language, and some of them of her own invention, are interwoven with Sappho’s poetry. But the Rustic Bridegroom, and the Porter at the Wedding, she has ridiculed in a different style; using very mean expressions, and a choice of words less suitable to poetry than to prose.” *Demet. Phal.* § 166. 167. 168. — An ape dressed in fine cloaths does not cease to be ludicrous: and in the Mock-Heroic poem, where the subject is contemptible or mean, great elegance, or even magnificence, of diction, may heighten the ridicule; of which, the *Lutrin*, the *Dunciad*, the *Rape of the Lock*, and the *Battle of the Frogs and Mice*, abound in examples. — But it is probable, that Demetrius is here speaking of *Burlesque*, and that Sappho’s poem on the wedding was of that character; — something perhaps resembling the *Ballad*, said to be written by James I. King of Scotland, and commonly known by the name of *Christ’s Kirk on the Green*. And it is true, that in *Burlesque* writing, as distinguished from the *Mock-Heroic*, vulgarity of expression is almost indispensable. See above, chap. 2. sect. iv. 9. 10. 11.

from the poetry, which is finished in Virgil's best manner, and is indeed highly picturesque, and very beautiful \*.

What has been said on the subject of Similitudes, when applied to the present purpose, amounts to this: "Incongruity does not appear ludicrous, when it is so qualified, or circumstanced, as to raise in the mind some emotion more powerful than that of Laughter."

V. If, then, it be asked, WHAT IS THAT QUALITY IN THINGS, WHICH MAKES THEM PROVOKE THAT PLEASING EMOTION OR SENTIMENT WHEREOF LAUGHTER IS THE EXTERNAL SIGN? I answer, IT IS AN UNCOMMON MIXTURE OF RELATION AND CONTRARIETY, EXHIBITED, OR SUPPOSED TO BE UNITED, IN THE SAME ASSEMBLAGE. If again it be asked, WHETHER SUCH A MIXTURE WILL ALWAYS PROVOKE LAUGHTER? my answer is, IT WILL ALWAYS, OR FOR THE MOST PART, EXCITE THE RISIBLE EMOTION, UNLESS WHEN THE PERCEPTION OF IT IS ATTENDED WITH SOME OTHER EMOTION OF GREATER AUTHORITY.

\* *Ceu quondam torto volitans sub verberibus turbo,  
Quem pueri magno in gyro vacua atria circum,  
Intenti ludo exercent; ille actus habena  
Curvatis fertur spatibus: stupet infans supra  
Impubesque manus, mirata velubile buxum.  
Dant animos plagæ, &c. *Æneid*, vii. 378.*

It cannot be expected, that I should give a complete list of those emotions that do commonly, in a sound mind, bear down this ludicrous emotion. Several of them have been specified in the course of this inquiry. We have seen, from the examples given, that moral disapprobation, pity, fear, disgust, admiration, are among the number; to which every person, who attends to what passes in his own mind, may perhaps be able to add several others.

I am well aware, that the comparative strength of our several emotions is not the same in each individual. In some the more serious affections are so prevalent, that the risible disposition operates but seldom, and with a feeble impulse: in some, the latter predominates so much, that the others are scarce able to counteract its energy. It is hardly possible to arrive at principles so comprehensive as to include the peculiarities of every individual. These are sometimes so inconsistent with the general law of the species, that they may be considered as deviations from the ordinary course of nature. In tracing *Sentimental Laughter* to its first principles, I have examined it, only as it is found to operate, for the most part, in the generality of mankind,

## C H A P. IV.

An attempt to account for the superiority of the moderns in Ludicrous Writing.

**I**T seems to be generally acknowledged, that the moderns are superior to the ancient Greeks and Romans, in every sort of Ludicrous Writing. If this be indeed the case, it is a fact that deserves the attention of those authors who make Wit, or Humour, the subject of their inquiry; since the same reasonings that account for this fact must throw light on the philosophy of laughter. But by those people who argue for argument's sake, probable reasons might be urged, to show, that we are not competent judges of the ancient humour, and therefore cannot be certain of the superiority of the modern. Were I to defend this side of the question, the following should be my arguments.

Every thing that gives variety to the thoughts, the manners, and employments of men, must also tend to diversify their conversations and compositions in general, and  
their

their wit and humour in particular. Accordingly we find, that almost every profession in life has a turn of humour, as well as of thinking and acting, peculiar in some degree to itself. The foldier, the feaman, the mechanic, the husbandman, is more amused by the conversation of people of his own trade, than by that of others : and a species of wit shall be highly relished in one club or society, which in another would be but little attended to. We need not wonder, then, that in the humour of each country there should be some peculiar character, to the forming of which, not only the language and manners, but even the climate and soil, must contribute, by giving a peculiar direction to the pursuits and thoughts of the inhabitants. Nor need we wonder, that each nation should be affected most agreeably with its own wit and humour. For, not to mention the prejudice that one naturally entertains in favour of what is one's own, a native must always understand, better than foreigners can, the relations, contrarieties, and allusions, implied in what is ludicrous in the speech and writings of his countrymen.

Shakespeare's humour will never be adequately relished in France, nor that of Moliere in England : and translations of ludicrous writings are seldom popular, unless they exhibit something of the manners and habits of thinking, as well as the language, of the people to whom they are addressed.

Echard's Terence, from having adopted such a multitude of our cant phrases, and proverbial allusions, is perhaps more generally relished in Great Britain, than a more literal and more elegant version would have been. Sancho Pança diverts us more in Motteux's Don Quixote, than in Jervas's Translation, or Smollet's; because he has more of the English clown, and less of the Spaniard, in the former, than in the latter. And a certain French author, to render his Translation of Tom Jones more acceptable to his countrymen, and to clear it of what he foolishly calls English phlegm, has greatly abridged that incomparable performance, and, in my opinion, expunged some of the finest passages; those conversation-pieces, I mean, which tend more immediately to the elucidation of the characters, than to the progress of the story.

May there not, then, in ancient authors, be many excellent strokes of wit and humour, which we misapprehend, merely because we cannot adequately relish? The dialogues of the Socratic philosophers abound in pleasantry, which is no doubt entertaining to a modern reader, but which does not at all come up to those expectations that one would be apt to form of it from the high encomiums of Cicero, and other ancient critics: and may not this be partly imputed to our not sufficiently understanding the Socratic dialogues? To us nothing appears more paltry in the execution, than the ridicule with  
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which Aristophanes persecuted Socrates : and yet we know, that it operated with wonderful energy on the Athenians, who, for refinement of taste, and for wit and humour, were distinguished among all the nations of antiquity. Does not this amount to a presumption, that we are no competent judges of the humour of that profligate comedian ?

Let it be remarked, too, that the sphere most favourable to wit and humour is that which is occupied by the middle and lower ranks of mankind ; persons in high stations being obliged to maintain a reserve unfriendly to risible emotion, and to reduce their behaviour to an artificial uniformity, which does indeed answer many important purposes, but which, for the most part, disqualifies them for filling any eminent place in humorous description. Now we are much in the dark in regard to the manners that prevailed among the Greeks and Romans of the lower sort : and there must have been, in their ludicrous writings, as there are in ours, many nice allusions to trifling customs, to the news of the day, and to characters and incidents too inconsiderable to be minded by the historian, which none but persons living at the time, and in a particular place, could ever comprehend ; — as the writers of those days had no notion of the modern practice of illustrating their own works with marginal annotations. Many authors, too, are lost ; and with them has probably perished (as we

remarked already) the ludicrous effect of innumerable parodies and turns of expression, to be met with in Aristophanes, Plautus, Lucian, Horace, and other witty ancients. It is at least certain, that there are in Shakspeare many parodies and allusions, the propriety of which we cannot estimate, as the authors, customs, and incidents, referred to, are already forgotten.

From the causes now hinted at, works of wit and humour would appear to be less permanent in their effects, and more liable to become obscure, than any other literary compositions. Commentaries are now necessary to make Hudibras and the Dunciad thoroughly intelligible: and what a mysterious rhapsody would the Rape of the Lock be to those, who, though well instructed in the language of Hooker and Spenser, had never heard of snuff or coffee, watches or hoop-petticoats, beaus or lap-dogs, toilettes or card-tables! But the reasonings of Euclid and Demosthenes, the moral and natural paintings of Homer and Virgil, the pathos of Eloisa's Epistle to Abelard, the descriptions of Livy and Tacitus, can never stand in need of commentaries to explain them, so long as the Greek, Latin, and English languages are tolerably understood; because they are founded in those suggestions of human reason, and those appearances in the moral and material world, which are always  
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the same, and with which every intelligent observer must in every age be acquainted.

I would not insinuate, that all sorts of Ludicrous writing are equally liable to lose their effect, and be misunderstood. Those must preserve their relish unimpaired through ages, which allude, — to our more permanent follies and absurdities; like Horace's picture of an intrusive coxcomb, and the greater part of the satire which he levels at pedantry and avarice; — or to writings transcendently excellent; like the Virgilian cento of Ausonius, the Splendid Shilling of Philips, and the *Batrachomyomachia* erroneously ascribed to Homer; — or to customs or opinions universally known; such as Lucian's ridicule of the Pagan Theology, and that inimitable raillery on the abuses of learning which is contained in the memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. — I mean only to say, that Ludicrous writing in general is extremely subject to the injuries of time; and that, therefore, the wit and humour of the ancient Greeks and Romans might have been far more exquisite, than we at present have any positive reason to believe.

Such would be my plan of declamation, if I were to controvert the common opinion of our superiority to the ancients in Ludicrous writing. But I am not anxious to dispute this point; being satisfied, that the common opinion is true; and that, considering the advantages in this respect which the  
moderns

moderns enjoy, the case cannot well be otherwise.

Modern Ridicule, compared with the ancient, will be found to be, first, *more copious*, and, secondly, *more refined*.

I. The superior COPIOUSNESS of the former may be accounted for, if we can show, that to us many sources of wit and humour are both open and obvious, which to the ancients were utterly unknown. It is indeed reasonable to suppose, that they may have been acquainted with many ludicrous objects, whereof we are ignorant; but that we must be acquainted with many more, of which they were ignorant, will hardly be questioned by those who admit, that laughter arises from incongruous and unexpected combinations of ideas; and that our fund of ideas is more ample and more diversified than that of the Greeks and Romans, because our knowledge is more extensive both of men and of things. Far be it from me, to undervalue the attainments of that illustrious part of the human race. The Greeks and Romans are our masters in all polite learning; and their knowledge is to ours, what the foundation is to a superstructure. Our superiority, where we have any, is the consequence of our being posterior in time, and enjoying the benefit of their discoveries and example, as well as the fruits of our own industry. At any rate, the superiority I now contend for is such as the warmest admirer  
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of the ancients may admit, without disrespect to their memory, or injury to their reputation.

To compare the late acquisitions in knowledge with the ancient discoveries, would far exceed the bounds of a short Essay, and is not necessary at present. All I mean to do, is to make a few brief remarks on the subject, with a view to account for the superior *copiousness* of modern ridicule.

That in most branches of philosophy, and natural history, the moderns have greatly the advantage of the ancients, is undeniable. Hence we derive an endless multitude of notions and ideas unknown to antiquity, which, by being differently combined and compared, give rise to innumerable varieties of that species of ludicrous association which is called Wit. Every addition to literature enlarges the sphere of wit, by supplying new images, and new opportunities of tracing out unexpected similitude: nor would the author of Hudibras have excelled so much in this talent, if he had not been distinguished by uncommon acquisitions in learning, as well as by a singular turn of fancy. One cannot read a canto of his extraordinary Poem, without discovering his ability in both these respects; or a page, without being struck with some jocular allusion, which could not have occurred to the wits of Greece or Rome, because it depends on ideas with which they were unacquainted.

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The moderns are also better instructed in all the varieties of human manners. They know what the ancients were, and what they themselves are; and their improvements, in commerce, geography, and navigation, have wonderfully extended their knowledge of mankind within the two last centuries. They have seen, by the light of history, the greatest and politest nations gradually swallowed up in the abyss of barbarism, and again by slow degrees emerging from it. Their policy and spirit of adventure have made them well acquainted with many nations whose very existence was anciently unknown; and it is now easier to sail round the globe, than it then was to explore the coasts of the Mediterranean sea. Hence, I shall not say that we have acquired any superior knowledge of those faculties essential to human nature, which constitute the foundation of moral science: but hence it is clear, that we derive a very great variety of those ideas of the characters and circumstances of mankind, which by their different arrangements and colourings, form that species of ludicrous combination which is called Humour.

To be somewhat more particular: Certain forms of government are familiar to the moderns, of which the ancients knew almost nothing. I mention only the Feudal System; the influence whereof has in latter times wrought so amazing a change on the affairs

and manners of Europe. Other invaders have satisfied themselves with introducing their laws and customs gradually into a conquered province: but the subverters of the Roman empire, all at once, with a rapidity equal to that wherewith they marched and fought, gave new forms to society, new analogies to language, and a new direction to the thoughts and passions of men. Ideas of political subordination, such as had never occurred to the most fanciful projectors of Greece and Rome, now took possession of the human mind, and obliterated all the philosophy of the ancient republican. — One of the most immediate effects of this system was, to make a separation between the different orders of men, and to subject human intercourse to the rules of a more complex economy: — this would be the natural consequence of instituting the several gradations of vassalage, and annexing high prerogatives to the condition of a superior. In a republic, the citizens must often meet together upon the footing of equality and mutual independence; and, having nearly the same purposes in view, and enjoying the same privileges, will contract similar habits of thinking, and be animated with similar passions, and marked with a sameness of character, or at least of external deportment. In a despotic empire, where all the subjects are equally insignificant and hopeless, and where to remain undistinguished, is the best and

almost the only security, picturesque diversities of genius and disposition are still less to be expected. But in a feudal state, where the primitive spirit of freedom predominates, the orders of men, on account of their vast inequality, must form themselves into separate societies, which, while their respective privileges and pretensions keep them active, mutual jealousy or ambition will prompt to make a figure, each in its own particular sphere, and by means peculiar to itself. — It has been remarked, that varieties of character are more perceptible in England, than in other countries : and I submit to the reader, whether this may not be accounted for, on the principles here specified. Were the country-gentlemen of England to live in towns, or to meet frequently in a common *forum*, or in any other way to form one large society, their peculiarities would disappear, and their behaviour (like that of citizens in a republic) would become externally uniform, or nearly so : and if they were not conscious of their own independence and privileges, they would not have the courage to think for themselves, but would probably be (like many of their neighbours) imitators of one another, or insipid followers of the fashion. Let me not be supposed to insinuate, that variety of *genius* and *temper* is peculiar to any one form of government : — different characters I am sensible that there always will be, where-ever there are different men : — my  
meaning



meaning is, that the *manners* of individuals, and those outward circumstances of life that supply materials for wit and humour, are liable to be more diversified by some forms of government than by others, and by free governments of the feudal form more perhaps than by any other. — The laughable peculiarities that distinguish Don Quixote, Parson Adams, Sir Roger de Coverley, Squire Western, and many other heroes of the Comic Romance, are such as men could not be supposed to acquire, if they did not live secluded in some degree from the general intercourse of society. We smile, when sailors use at land the language of the sea, when learned pedants interlard ordinary discourse with Greek and Latin idioms, when coxcombs bring abroad into the world the dialect and gesticulations of their own club, and, in general, when a man expresses himself on all subjects in figures of speech suggested by what belongs to his own profession only. Now what but habits contracted in a narrow society could produce these peculiarities? And does not this prove, that ludicrous qualities are incident to men who live detached in a narrow society, and, therefore, that the feudal, or any other, form of government, that tends to keep the different orders of men separate, must be favourable to wit and humour, and so enlarge the sphere of ludicrous writing? — A general acquaintance with mankind, produces a facility of

doing what is conformable to general manners, and wears off those improprieties and strange habits that divert by their singularity.

But whatever account the reader may make of these reasonings, this at least he must allow, that from the feudal government arose one institution, I mean Chivalry, which gave occasion to Cervantes to invent a species of writing, as fertile of humour, (and of wit, too, if Hudibras be an imitation of it) as any that ever appeared in the world. Need we wonder, then, that the modern ridicule should be more *copious* than the ancient ?

Religious Controversy is in modern times a never-failing source of wit and humour. But in the days of Greece and Rome there was no such thing ; the Pagan superstitions being too absurd to admit of controversy. From this source we derive many witty passages in the writings of Chaucer, Erasmus, Pascal, and others ; and it is to this we are indebted for Hudibras and The Tale of a Tub, two of the most laughable (I wish I could say the most salutary) pieces of ridicule that ever were written. It may seem surprising, that things so serious and awful, as superstition and enthusiasm, should lie open to the attack of the wit and buffoon, as well as of the satirist. Indeed, if we estimate them by their effects in society, and their power over the human mind, they would seem worthy

thy to be reckoned among the most tremendous phenomena in nature. And so they are, no doubt; and, for this reason, may be made the ground-work of tragedy, serious satire, rhetorical invective, and other sublime compositions. But when we consider them as they are in themselves, and with a view to the causes whence they frequently arise, the arguments by which they are supported, and the strange vagaries into which they have led rational beings, we must be struck with something ludicrous in their appearance; particularly, with the vast disproportion, between their real and imaginary dignity; between their genuine effects, and those that, previously to experience, we should be inclined to expect from them. And thus it is, that superstition and enthusiasm, while they appear in the light, not of crimes, but of infirmities, may very well be made the subject of Comic Ridicule. But let the torch of wit be brandished against them with discretion superior to that of the Dean of St Patrick's; lest, while it is employed to dispel the gloom, that by investing the shrine of these demons conceals their deformity, it should be permitted to dart sacrilegious fire into the neighbouring sanctuary of religion.

Gallantry (by which I here understand those generous and respectful attentions we pay to the Fair Sex) contributes in many ways both to the *copiousness* and to the *refine-*

*ment* of wit and humour. Nor is there evidence, that this mode of politeness at all subsisted in Greece or Rome, at least in its present form. There, the women, secluded from general conversation, were known only by their domestic virtues, or by crimes that exposed them to public abhorrence; while the nicer discriminations of the female character, which supply materials for comic writing, were little attended to:—nor could they, in that sequestered condition, ever arrive at those improvements in taste, address, and delicacy, which may be communicated by modern education, and which in a modern youth may excite a purer and more interesting attachment than ever animated a Greek or Roman lover. In fact, there is nothing in modern manners more characteristic than this Gallantry, and few things that would surprize an ancient more. It bespeaks, on the part of the men, a mixture, of tenderness and respect, of deference and esteem, which the politest gallant of antiquity never thought of; and of familiarity and reserve, confidence and caution, on the part of the women, which the Greek and Roman ladies, confined to the society of their own sex, and intimidated by a rigorous economy that rendered their state little better than servitude, could have neither inclination nor opportunity to acquire.

The old Germans, (as we learn from Tacitus

citus \*), and those warriors of the north who invaded the Roman empire, were on all occasions attended by their women; whom, if they did not love with romantic fondness, they esteemed for their friendly counsels and faithful service, and sometimes considered as oracles, by whom the gods gave intimation of future events †. But in the more genial regions

\* Tacitus, *De moribus Germanorum*. — Thucydides was of opinion, that she is the best woman, of whom there is least speech, either to her praise or dispraise; and that the name of a lady of honour ought always, like her body, to be kept at home, and never permitted to go abroad. This doctrine, which conveys no comfortable idea of the Grecian economy in regard to the Fair Sex, is warmly controverted by the gallant and good-natured Plutarch; who, in his treatise of the virtues of women, contends, “that virtue always deserves honour wherever it is found, but especially when it is the work of a feeble agent; and that, therefore, female virtue is peculiarly worthy of praise, that not only their own sex, but men also, may profit by the example.”—Many female characters of high virtue are indeed celebrated by ancient historians and poets; and innumerable testimonies in their favour might be cited from the Greek and Roman authors. Yet still the general treatment of women at Rome, but especially in Greece, was such as we should not scruple to call tyrannical and cruel; as partaking much of the Asiatic severity, little of the Gothic and German confidence, and nothing at all of the liberality, gentleness, and affectionate homage, of modern gallantry.

† I know not, whether it proceeded from the respect the northern nations paid their women, or to what other cause it was owing; but it is surely very singular, and what, on Mr Harris’s principles, (see *Hermes*, p. 45.), could

regions of Asia, the sexes lived on a very different footing. Without a grain of esteem on either side, the men regarded the women with sentiments of untender, though passionate love; and the women, secluded from public view, and cut off from the means of rational improvement, were insipid and submissive, as slaves must be under the rod of tyranny. Modern gallantry comprehends every thing that is agreeable in these two modes of domestic intercourse; avoiding the slavish and unmanly principles of the latter, and whatever favours of harshness in the former. With all due regard to external charms, it is still more sensible of moral and intellectual beauty; and while it favours the enthusiasm, and disavows the jealousy, of the enamoured Asiatic, it exalts and refines those sentiments of rational esteem which we inherit from our free-born ancestors of the north. In a word, the superiority, vested by law in the male sex, is now amply compensated to the female, by that tender complaisance, with which they are treated in all polite nations; and which, from the use they make of it in improving society, and enlivening conversation, it appears that they so justly deserve.

could not be easily accounted for, that in the Saxon and some other northern languages, the Sun should be of the feminine gender, and the Moon masculine. See Hicke's Thesaurus.

Is it not obvious, that this gallantry tends to enlarge the sphere of Comic writing? By admitting us to the conversation of the fair sex, it brings us acquainted with an entire class of characters, wherein, though we must discern every sort of human excellence, we may also trace out (since nothing sublunary is perfect) a variety of those little faults and absurdities, which Aristotle, had he known them, would have allowed to be fit objects of Comic Ridicule. But neither Aristotle, nor any other ancient, can vie with the moderns, in knowledge of the female character. We see nothing of it, or next to nothing, in the comedies or satires of Greece and Rome. Whereas, in the writings of Fielding, Young, Pope, and Shakespeare, not to mention the French and Italian authors, the freaks and foibles of the female world supply a rich fund of humorous entertainment.

Further: Considering the form of intercourse now subsisting between the sexes, so different from that which anciently prevailed, and their different pursuits and accomplishments thence resulting; is there not reason to suppose, that the passions wherewith they inspire each other should also be different? Romantic Love seems to be almost peculiar to the latter ages. This passion may perhaps be traced up to that spirit of courtesy and adventure which arose from circumstances peculiar to feudal government, distinguished all the institutions of chivalry,

gave birth and form to the old romance, and consequently to the new, and to this day influences in a perceptible degree the customs and manners of Europe. More delicate and more generous than the Greek or Roman loves, this passion is also more interesting, and may of course be presumed to be more powerful. Shakespeare, and the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, have indeed shown, that even in modern times this passion is not essential, either in tragedy or in romance, to form an affecting fable: but the generality of late writers, if we may judge of their opinions by their practice, seem to think otherwise; and that to every sort of fictitious narrative, from an Epic poem to a Pastoral, from *Amadis de Gaul* to the last published novel, a love-story is as ornamental and necessary, as leaves to a tree, or a mistress to a knight-errant.

As romantic love in its natural and regular procedure, is now become so copious a source of joy and sorrow, hope and fear, triumph and disappointment, we might reasonably conclude, that in its more whimsical forms and vagaries it could scarce fail to supply materials for laughter. And that this is the case, nobody in the least acquainted with modern life or modern literature needs be informed. I mention not its laughable extravagancies, as they appear in *Don Quixote*, *Sir Roger de Coverley*, and other heroes on record; and far be it from me to specify on  
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this occasion any of the various forms of female prudery and coquetry, of which I always think with the most profound reverence. But the reader would wonder at me, if I did not remark, that to affectations and follies, which I fear are imputable to this gentle passion, we owe an endless train of fops, coxcombs, beaux, male coquets, cicisbeos, and danglers; a breed of animals unknown to the ancients; and which, if they were but as harmless as they are contemptible, might be allowed to rank with the most ridiculous things on the face of the earth.

Other causes for the superior copiousness of modern ridicule I shall only hint at; as illustration is not necessary to render their effects obvious to the reader.

We have a far greater variety of authors to allude to, in the way of parody and burlesque, than the ancients had; for we have both ancient authors and modern: and to an excessive admiration of the former some late wits have ascribed the origin of a new species of ludicrous character, whereof we have several strong outlines in the travelling physician in *Peregrine Pickle*, and a finished portrait in the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. There was indeed, in the days of *Horace* \*, a sort of character not unlike this;

\* *Hor. Epist. ad Augustum, vers. 19. — 27.*

a set of critics, who, despising the literary productions of their own time, were perpetually extolling the ancient Roman authors, and tracing out divine beauties of style in writings that were become almost unintelligible. But these critics are rather to be ranked with those of our antiquarians who prefer Chaucer and Langland to Dryden and Milton, and, like Pope's Parish-clerk, take a kindly affection even to the black letter in which the former are printed. The taste of such men may be singular; but as their labours are often highly useful in illustrating ancient history, it would not be possible, without violent misrepresentation, to make them so ridiculous, as Pope and Arbuthnot have made the elder and younger Scriblerus.

It may also be remarked, that our customs in regard to dress change more frequently than the Greek or Roman did. Whether this be owing to our improvements in commerce, and superior zeal for varieties of manufacture, or to a bad taste in dress, which must always be changing, because it has no fixed principle; or to the influence of the feudal manners; or to the luxuries peculiar to opulent monarchy, — I do not now inquire: — but a certain fact it is, that the Greek and Roman dresses were in a great degree permanent, while ours are liable to endless variety and alteration. A circumstance this, that may at first view seem unconnected with the present subject; but to which the admirers  
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of the Rape of the Lock, Spectator, and Tatler, are indebted for some of the finest humour that ever was written.

Commerce, and all the arts connected with it, are more successfully cultivated by modern, than they were by ancient nations. Hence a variety of new employments, which, by dividing mankind into separate professions and societies, multiply human characters, and enlarge the sphere of humour. And hence, as was observed, an infinite number of new objects and ideas, that extend the bounds of wit, by suggesting new sources of comparison, and ludicrous arrangement. — The art of Printing, too, by diffusing literature, has made the characters of mankind better known, and raised up a greater variety of authors, whose different pursuits and adventures yield materials for that mode of ludicrous writing, in which the Dunciad may be considered as the most capital performance.

To a full examination of the present topic, it would be further necessary, to give a critical analysis of our most celebrated works in wit and humour, and of the human characters displayed in them; and to inquire, from what external causes the laughable peculiarities in each character arise; and how far the same or similar causes could take place in ancient times. But this I leave as a theme to amuse the leisure of future critics; and shall conclude with a remark or two on the SUPERIOR REFINEMENT of modern ridicule.

II. If modern ridicule be more *copious* than the ancient, of which there seems to be sufficient proof, it must also, according to the natural progress of things, be more *refined*. For, as was hinted already, the more conversant we are among pleasurable objects of any particular class, the more sagacious we become in estimating their comparative excellence, and our taste of course becomes more delicate. When a savage or clown sees a picture for the first time, his wonder is raised to the highest pitch, even tho' the merit of the piece be but small: — he never beheld any thing so admirable; he can conceive nothing beyond it. Make him gradually acquainted with a number of pictures, and engage him to fix his attention upon each, and you shall see him of his own accord begin to form comparisons; to discover beauties in one, which are not in another, or not in the same degree; and at last, perhaps, to find out imperfections in the best, and to conceive something in the art still better than he has ever seen. — Homely jokes delight the vulgar, because their knowledge of ludicrous combination is limited. Let this knowledge be extended; let them hear varieties of conversation, or read the works of witty authors, and their taste will improve of itself: and those jokes will at length appear despicable, which formerly they mistook for excellent. That the humour of Addison and Pope should be more refined than that of Lucian and

and Horace, that Swift should be more delicate than Rabelais, and Foote than Aristophanes, is therefore not more surprising, than that the man of observation, who has made the tour of Europe, should be a better judge of elegance in building and furniture, than he who has never travelled beyond the frontier of his native province.

But, if this progress towards perfection of taste hold universally, why, it may be said, do not we excel the ancients in our taste of books and writing in general; since it is plain, that in this respect also we have more experience than they? I answer: If all the books we have, the new as well as old, had been written in a good taste, and we as attentive readers as the ancients were, it is not absurd to suppose, that our taste in writing might have been more perfect than theirs. But we have such numbers of books to read, and so many of them trifling, and so many unskilfully written, that we are apt to lose the habit of attentive study, and even to contract a liking to inelegant or faulty composition. For inattention long indulged settles into a habit; and the same susceptibility of nature, which in time reconciles some men to the relish of tobacco and strong liquors, may also gradually admit a depravation in the mental taste of those to whom deformity and impropriety have long been familiar. — I supposed the clown, the savage, and the traveller, attentive to what they saw; and

I did not suppose every thing they saw to be bad in its kind. Had every thing been bad, or they inattentive, it would have been impossible for them, in the case I mentioned, ever to acquire a taste in painting, building, or furniture: and were a man never to hear any but coarse and vulgar jokes, I question whether his taste in ridicule would ever improve, though he were to hear them by hundreds and thousands every day. — And therefore I admit, that the progress above mentioned, towards perfection of taste, holds, not universally, but only in certain circumstances; and that the superior *refinement* of modern ridicule cannot be accounted for, from its superior *copiousness*, unless we can prove it to have received cultivation from the influence of other causes peculiar to the condition of men in modern times.

And, in order to prove this, I observe, secondly, That what we call the point of honour (though in many respects blameable) has, in conjunction with a spirit of courtesy derived from the same Feudal origin, tended greatly in these latter times to check intemperate passion, and regulate human speech. And nothing, perhaps, has more effectually softened conversation, by discountenancing indelicacy, and by promoting good humour, gentle manners, and a desire to please, than the society of the fair sex; an acquisition whereof neither the sages of Greece and Rome, nor the voluptuaries of Asia, ever

knew the value; and for which Europe is indebted to the refinements peculiar to modern gallantry. Nor is it only by studying to avoid whatever might be offensive to female delicacy, that we derive improvement from our amiable partners in social life. They set us an example, from which it is our own fault if we receive no benefit. The liveliness of their fancy, the purity of their taste, and the unstudied ease of their elocution, give to modern conversation an elegance and a variety, which the Socratic school itself would have been proud to take for a model.

My third remark is, That political institutions have also an effect on ludicrous writing, as on every thing else in which that political creature Man is concerned. The mirth of a savage, when he gives way to it, is mere madness; as his sorrow approaches for the most part to despair. But savages are little addicted to jocularities: their looks, their songs, and their music are solemn; they are continually engrossed by emotions more powerful than this of laughter;—a necessary effect of their violent temper, and of their needy and perilous condition. Wit and humour, and those nicer improvements of speech that minister to pleasure rather than necessity, seldom appear among a people, till public peace be tolerably secure. And as monarchy is, of all governments, the least liable to either external assault, or intestine commotion, and leaves the subject most at leisure

for both private business and private amusement; it would seem of course more favourable to every species of *comic* writing, than any of the republican forms; in which important affairs, and consequently important emotions, must ever be present to the sober-minded citizen. And where persons of all ranks, and those ranks very different, often meet in society, and the public welfare depends on their living on good terms with one another, each within the sphere of his own prerogative, (a state of things not to be looked for in Democracy or Despotism, but very compatible with limited monarchy), — politeness of behaviour must needs take place; while the great find it for their interest to please the people; and the people, to recommend themselves to the favour of the great. This general politeness, which is one distinguishing characteristic of monarchy, and which the example of a court is alone sufficient to make fashionable, must ever be unfriendly to rudeness of speech, and must therefore refine wit and humour, while it polishes conversation. Now it is observable, that in modern times Monarchy gives the law to those parts of the world that aspire to a literary character, as Republican government did of old. Does not this, added to the former consideration, account in some measure for the superior refinement of the modern wit and humour?

And now, notwithstanding the levity of  
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many of these remarks, and the uninteresting title prefixed to them, may we not be permitted to observe in conclusion, that the meek and benevolent spirit of our religion has had a powerful influence in sweetening and refining all the comforts of human society, and Conversation among the rest? — That humility, gentleness, and kind affection, whereof good-breeding ever assumes the outward form, does not Christianity establish in the heart as a permanent principle of indispensable obligation? That generous love of humankind, which prompts the Christian to watch for the good of others, and embrace every opportunity of promoting, not only their welfare, but their virtue, taking care never to offend, and avoiding even the appearance of evil, — would not the man of taste acknowledge to be the very perfection and heroism of polite behaviour? Must not the affecting view that true religion exhibits, of all mankind bearing to one another the relation of brethren, impart keenness and activity to those tender sympathies of our social nature, whereof the language of good-breeding is so remarkably expressive? Christianity commands, not the suppression only, but the extinction, of every indelicate thought, arrogant emotion, and malevolent purpose: — would conversation stand in need of any further refinement, if this law were as punctually fulfilled, as it is earnestly recommended? What is more efficacious,

than habitual good-humour, in rendering the intercourse of society agreeable, and in keeping at a distance all intemperate passion, and all harshness of sentiment and language? — and of what religion, but the Christian, can we say with truth, that it supplies, in every state of human affairs, a perpetual source of inward consolation? In a word, true Christianity, alone and at once, transforms a barbarian into a man; a brutal, selfish, and melancholy savage, into a kind, a generous, and a chearful associate.

Will it be said, that delicacy of speech and behaviour may be communicated and acquired by the means recommended in some late LETTERS, namely, by external applications, and by the use of certain mechanical phrases, looks, and gestures? As well may the painting of the cheeks and eye-brows be prescribed as a preservative from the rheumatism, and perfumed snuff as an antidote against hunger and thirst. He has learned little of the true interests of human society, and nothing at all of the human mind, who does not know, that without sincerity there could not be either happiness or comfort upon earth; that permanent propriety of conduct has its source in the heart; and that, if all men believed one another to be knaves and hypocrites, politeness of language and attitude, instead of being graceful, would appear as ridiculous, as the chatter of a parrot, or the grin of a monkey. Who, that has  
the

the spirit of a man, could take pleasure in professions of good-will, which he knew to be insincere? Who, that is not conscious of some baseness in himself, could seriously imagine, that mankind in general might be rendered susceptible of such pleasure? I speak not now of the immorality of that new system; which, if I were inclined to say of it what I think, would give deeper, as well as louder, tones to my language: I speak only of its absurdity and folly. And absurd, and foolish, in the extreme, as well as wicked, must every system be, that aims to disjoin delicacy from virtue, or virtue from religion.

Let us not imagine, because the influence of religion is not so powerful as it ought to be, that therefore it is not powerful at all. What human creatures would have been at this day, if the light of the gospel had not yet arisen upon the earth, we cannot positively tell: but were this a proper place for explaining the ground of such a conjecture, I think I could demonstrate the reasonableness of supposing, that they must have been, beyond all comparison, more wretched than they are. At a time, when it was debased by the most lamentable superstitions, religion taught courtesy and soberness to the sons of chivalry: a circumstance whereof the salutary effects are still discernible in the manners of Europe. How much greater may we presume its efficacy to be in these days, when it is taught in its purity, and may be under-

stood by all! — But infidels, it may be objected, are as eminent for polite behaviour, as believers. Granting this to be true, which however it is impossible to prove, I would only desire those, who second the objection, to consider, whether the present system of politeness arose among infidels or Christians; whether it would have arisen at all, if paganism had continued to prevail; whether several of its distinguishing characters be not derived from the Christian religion; whether the light of reason, unaided by the radiance of the gospel, would have dispelled so soon that night of intellectual darkness which followed the subversion of the Roman empire: — and, lastly, whether it be not prudent for a few individuals (unbelievers being still, as I trust, the smaller number in these parts of the world) to conform to the manners of the many, especially when those manners are universally felt and acknowledged to be more agreeable than any other. The influence of true religion, in humanizing society, and refining conversation, is indeed very great. And if so, I could not, consistently with my present plan, overlook it. Nor is it, in my opinion, possible for a philosopher, unless blinded by ignorance, checked by timidity, or led astray by prejudice, to enter into any inquiry relating either to morals or to manners, without paying some tribute of praise to that Divine Institution.

T H E E N D.



# R E M A R K S

ON THE UTILITY OF

## CLASSICAL LEARNING.

*Ego multos homines excellenti animo ac virtute fuisse, et sine doctrina, naturæ ipsius habitu prope divino, per seipso et moderatos, et graves, extitisse fateor. Etiam illud adjungo, sæpius ad laudem atque virtutem naturam sine doctrina, quam sine natura valuisse doctrinam. Atque idem ego contendo, cum ad naturam eximiam atque illustrem accesserit ratio quædam conformatioque doctrinæ, tum illud nescio quid præclarum ac singulare solere existere. — Quod si non hic tantus fructus ostenderetur, et si ex his studiis delectatio sola peteretur; tamen, ut opinor, hanc animi remissionem humanissimam ac liberatissimam judicaretis. — Hæc studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis perfugium ac solatium præbent, delectant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, peregrinantur, rusticantur.*

Cicero pro Archia, cap. 7.





# R E M A R K S

ON THE UTILITY OF

## C L A S S I C A L L E A R N I N G

Written in the year 1769.

**T**HE calumniators of the Greek and Roman Learning have not been few in these latter times. Perrault, La Motte, and Terasson, arraigned the taste of the ancients; and Des Cartes and Malebranche affected to despise their philosophy. Yet it seemed to be allowed in general, that the study of the Classic Authors was a necessary part of polite education. This, however, has of late been not only questioned, but denied: and it has been said, that every thing worth preserving of ancient literature might be more easily transmitted, both to us and to posterity, through the channel of the modern languages, than through that of the Greek and Latin. On this subject, several slight essays have been written; the authors of which seem to think, that the human mind, being now arrived at

maturity, may safely be left to itself; and that the Classic authors, those great instructors of former times, are become an incumbrance to the more sprightly genius of the present.

“ For who, that is an adept in the philo-  
 “ sophy of Locke and Newton, can have any  
 “ need of Aristotle? What useful precept  
 “ of the Socratic school has been overlook-  
 “ ed by modern moralists? Is not Geome-  
 “ try as fairly, and as fully displayed in the  
 “ French and English tongues, as in the un-  
 “ known dialects of Archimedes, Apollo-  
 “ nius, and Euclid? Why have recourse  
 “ to Demosthenes and Cicero, for examples  
 “ in an art, which Massillon, Bourdaloue,  
 “ and the French academicians, (to say no-  
 “ thing of the orators of our own country),  
 “ have carried to perfection? Are we not  
 “ taught by Voltaire and his Editors, who,  
 “ though ignorant of Greek, are well read  
 “ in Madam Dacier’s translations, that Tasso  
 “ is a better poet than Homer; and that the  
 “ sixth and seventh cantoes of the Henriade  
 “ are alone more valuable than the whole  
 “ Iliad \*? What Dramatic poet of anti-  
 “ quity is to be compared with the immortal  
 “ Shakespeare? what satirist with Pope, who  
 “ to all the fire and elevation of Juvenal,  
 “ joins the wit, the taste, and sententious  
 “ morality, of Horace? As to criticism :

\* See *Le Vicende della Letteratura*, pag. 166.



“ is there in Aristotle, Dionysius, Cicero,  
 “ Quintilian, or Longinus, any thing that  
 “ is not more philosophically explained, and  
 “ better illustrated by examples, in the wri-  
 “ tings of Dacier, Rollin, Fenelon, Dryden,  
 “ and Addison? — And then, how deba-  
 “ fting to an ingenuous mind is the drudgery  
 “ and discipline of our public schools!  
 “ That the best days of youth should be em-  
 “ bittered by confinement, amidst the gloom  
 “ of solitude, or under the scourge of ty-  
 “ ranny; and all for no purpose, but that  
 “ the memory may be loaded with the words  
 “ of two languages that have been dead up-  
 “ wards of a thousand years: — is it not an  
 “ absurdity too gross to admit of exaggera-  
 “ tion? To see a youth of spirit hanging  
 “ over a musty folio, his cheek pale with  
 “ watching, his brow furrowed with un-  
 “ timely wrinkles, his health gone, and eve-  
 “ ry power of his soul enervated with an-  
 “ xiety, and stupified with poring upon tri-  
 “ fles, — what blood boils not with indig-  
 “ nation, what heart melts not with sorrow!  
 “ And then the pedant, just broken loose  
 “ from his cell, bristling all o’er with Greek,  
 “ and puff’d with pride,” as Boileau says;  
 “ his head so full of words, that no room is  
 “ left for ideas; his accomplishments so high-  
 “ ly prized by himself, as to be intolerable  
 “ to others; ignorant of the history, and  
 “ untouched with the interests, of his na-  
 “ tive country; — what an uselefs, what an  
 “ odious

“ odious animal ! Who will say that edu-  
 “ cation is on a right footing, while its ten-  
 “ dency is, to create such a monster ! —  
 “ Ye parents, listen, and be wise. Would  
 “ you have your children healthy, and po-  
 “ lite, and *sentimental* ? Let their early  
 “ youth be employed in genteel exercises ;  
 “ the theatre, the coffeehouse, and the card-  
 “ table, will refine their taste, instruct them  
 “ in public affairs, and produce habits of  
 “ attention and contrivance ; and the French  
 “ authors will make them men of wit and  
 “ sprightly conversation, and give a certain  
 “ *je ne sçai quoi* of elegance to their whole  
 “ behaviour : — but for Greek and Latin,  
 “ the study of Gronovius, Scaliger, and  
 “ Burman, the accomplishment of Dutch  
 “ commentators and Jesuits ; — heavens !  
 “ what has a man of fashion to do with  
 “ it !”

Most of the discourses I have heard or read  
 on this side of the question were in a similar  
 style of vague declamation, seasoned with  
 high encomiums on the utility and elegance  
 of the French language and literature, and  
 on the late discoveries in physiology for which  
 we cannot be said to be indebted to any of  
 the sages of Greece and Rome. And how  
 easy is it to declaim on such a topic ! By  
 blending some truth with your falsehood ;  
 by giving to the latter the air of harmless  
 amplification, and by descanting on the ab-  
 uses of study, as if they were its natural con-  
 sequences,

quences, you may compose a very plausible harangue; such as could not be fully answered without greater waste of time and patience, than the champion of antiquity would think it worth his while to bestow. And if your doctrine happens to flatter the prejudices, the vanity, or the indolence of the age, you will be regarded by some as a fine writer, of liberal principles, and a manly spirit.

It is however thought by many, who in my opinion are more competent judges, that an early acquaintance with the classics is the only foundation of good learning, and that it is incumbent on all who direct the studies of youth, to have this great object continually before them, as a matter of the most serious concern; for that a good taste in literature is friendly both to public and to private virtue, and of course tends to promote in no inconsiderable degree the glory of a nation; and that as the ancients are more or less understood, the principles and the spirit of sound erudition will ever be found to flourish or decay. I shall therefore state as briefly as possible some of the peculiar advantages that seem to me to accompany this sort of study; with a view to obviate, if I can, certain prejudices, which I am sorry to observe have of late years been gaining ground, at least in the northern part of this island. The subject is copious; but I doubt whether those adversaries to whom I now address myself would

would take the trouble to read a long dissertation.

The objections that are most commonly made to the study of the Greek and Latin authors, may perhaps be reduced to four. It is said, first, “ that this mode of education “ obliges the student to employ too much “ time in the acquisition of words : — se- “ condly, that when he has acquired these “ languages, he does not find, that they re- “ pay his toil : — thirdly, that the studies “ of a Grammar-school have a tendency to “ encumber the genius, and consequently to “ weaken, rather than improve, the human “ mind : — and, lastly, that the classic au- “ thors contain many descriptions and doc- “ trines that may seduce the understanding, “ inflame the passions, and corrupt the “ heart.”

1. 1. In answer to the first objection, I would observe, that the plan of study must be very bad, where the student's health is hurt by too close application. Some parents and teachers have thought, that the proficiency of the scholar must be in proportion to the number of hours he employs in conning his task : but that is a great mistake. Experience proves, that three or four hours a-day, properly employed in the grammar-school, have a better effect than nine ; and are sufficient to lay within a few years a good foundation of classical knowledge. Dunces, it is true, would require more time ;  
but

but dunces have nothing to do with Greek and Latin: For studies that yield neither delight nor improvement are not only superfluous but hurtful; because they misemploy those faculties which nature had destined to other purposes. At the same time, therefore, that young men are prosecuting their grammatical studies, they may learn writing, drawing, arithmetic, and the principles of geometry; and may devote the intervals of leisure to riding, fencing, dancing, and other manly exercises. Idleness is the greatest misfortune incident to early years; the distempers it breeds in the soul are numberless and incurable. And where children, during their hours of relaxation, are left at their own disposal, they too often make choice of criminal amusement and bad company. At Sparta, the youth were continually under the inspection of those who had authority over them; their education, says Plutarch, was one continued exercise of obedience: but it was never said, that the Spartan youth became torpid, or melancholy, or sickly, from want of amusement. Wherever there is a school, there ought to be, and generally is, a field or area for diversions; and if the hours that boys in this country spend with one another, that is, in sauntering, and too often in gaming, quarrelling, and swearing, were to be devoted to exercise, under the eye of some person of prudence, their souls and bodies would both be the better

better for it; and a great deal of time left for the study of many branches of knowledge, besides what is contained in the grammar, and ancient authors. The misfortune is, that we allot too much of their time, not to play, but to idleness; and hence it happens, that their classical studies interfere with other necessary parts of education. But certain it is, that their studies and amusements might be made perfectly consistent; and the culture of the mind promoted at the same time with that of the body. If both these ends are not always accomplished, and but seldom pursued, the blame is to be laid, neither on the teacher, nor on the things that are taught, but on those persons only who have the power of reforming our school-discipline, and want the inclination. At any rate, the blame cannot be laid on the Classic Authors, or on those very useful members of a commonwealth, the compilers of grammars and dictionaries. For the faculties of children might be dissipated by idleness, their manners poisoned by bad company, or their health impaired by injudicious confinement, though Greek and Latin were annihilated.

2. It is another abuse of study, when the hours of attendance in a grammar-school are all employed in the acquisition of words. If a child find nothing but words in the old authors, it must be owing to the stupifying influence of an ignorant teacher. The most interesting

teresting part of profane history is delivered by the writers of Greece and Rome. From them also we may learn the purest precepts of uninspired morality, delivered in the most enchanting language, illustrated by the happiest allusions, and enforced by the most pertinent examples, and most emphatical reasoning. Whatever is amusive and instructive in fable, whatever in description is beautiful, or in composition harmonious, whatever can soothe or awaken the human passions, the Greek and Roman authors have carried to perfection. That children should enter into all these beauties, is not to be imagined; but that they may be made to comprehend them so far as to be improved and delighted in a high degree, admits of no doubt. Together with the words, therefore, of these two celebrated languages, they may learn, without any additional expence of time, the principles of history, morality, politics, geography, and criticism; which, when taught in a foreign dialect, will perhaps be found to leave a deeper impression upon the memory, than when explained in the mother tongue. The young student should be equally attentive to the phraseology and to the subject of his lesson; and receive directions for analysing the one, as well as for construing the other. He ought to read his authors, first as a grammarian, secondly as a philosopher, and lastly as a critic; and all this he may do without difficulty, and with delight as

well as profit, if care is taken to proportion his task to his years and capacity. Nor let it be supposed, that the first principles of grammar are more intelligible to a young mind, than the rudiments of philosophy and rhetoric. In matters within their sphere, do we not find that children can distinguish between truth and falsehood; perceive the connection of causes and effects; infer an obvious conclusion from plain premises, and even make experiments upon nature for the regulation of their own conduct? And if in music, and drawing, and penmanship, and phraseology, the taste of a child is improvable, why not in composition and style, the cadence of periods, and the harmony of verse, probability of fable, and accuracy of description? The more we attend to an author's subject, the greater proficiency we shall always make in his language. To understand the subject well, it is necessary to study the words and their connection with a critical eye; whereas, even when his knowledge of the words is very superficial, a scholar or tutor, who attends to nothing else, may think himself sufficiently acquainted with the author's meaning. The mere Grammatical teacher will never be found to have any true taste for his author: if he had, it would be impossible for him to confine himself to verbal remarks: he must give scope to his admiration or disgust, if he really feel those passions; and must therefore commu-  
nicate



nicate to the pupil some portion of his own enthusiasm or sagacity.

3. The mental faculties of children stand as much in need of improvement, and consequently of exercise, as their bodily powers. Nor is it of small importance to devise some mode of discipline for fixing their attention. When this is not done, they become thoughtless and dissipated to a degree that often unfits them for the business of life.

The Greeks and Romans had a just sense of the value of this part of education. The youth of Sparta, when their more violent exercises were over, employed themselves in works of stratagem; which in a state, where wealth and avarice were unknown, could hardly be carried to any criminal excess. When they met together for conversation, their minds were continually exerted in judging of the morality of actions, and the expediency of public measures of government; or in bearing with temper, and retorting with spirit, the sarcasms of good-natured raillery. They were obliged to express themselves, without hesitation, in the fewest and plainest words possible. These institutions must have made them thoughtful, and attentive, and observant both of men and things. And accordingly, their good sense, and penetration, and their nervous and sententious style, were no less the admiration of Greece, than their sobriety, patriotism, and invincible courage. For the talent of

*saying* what we call *good things* they were eminent among all the nations of antiquity. As they never piqued themselves on their rhetorical powers, it was prudent to accustom the youth to silence and few words. It made them modest and thoughtful. With us very sprightly children sometimes become very dull men. For we are apt to reckon those children the sprightliest, who talk the most: and as it is not easy for them to think and talk at the same time, the natural effect of their too much speaking is too little thinking. — At Athens, the youth were made to study their own language with accuracy both in the pronunciation and composition; and the meanest of the people valued themselves upon their attainments in this way. Their orators must have had a very difficult part to act, when by the slightest impropriety they ran the hazard of disgusting the whole audience: and we shall not wonder at the extraordinary effects produced by the harangues of Demosthenes, or the extraordinary care wherewith those harangues were composed; when we recollect, that the minutest beauty in his performance must have been perceived and felt by every one of his hearers. It has been matter of surprize to some, that Cicero, who had so true a relish for the severe simplicity of the Athenian orator, should himself in his orations have adopted a style so diffuse and declamatory. But Cicero knew what he did. He had a people to deal with,  
who,

who, compared with the Athenians, might be called illiterate \*; and to whom Demosthenes would have appeared as cold and uninteresting, as Cicero would have seemed pompous and inflated to the people of Athens: In every part of learning the Athenians were studious to excel. Rhetoric in all its branches was to them an object of principal consideration. From the story of Socrates we may learn, that the literary spirit was keener at Athens, even in that corrupted age, than at any period in any other country. If a person of mean condition, and of the lowest fortune, with the talents and temper of Socrates, were now to appear, inculcating virtue, dissuading from vice, and recommending a right use of reason, not with the grimace of an enthusiast, or the rant of a declaimer, but with good humour, plain language, and sound argument, we cannot suppose, that the youth of high rank would pay him much attention in any part of Europe. As a juggler, gambler, or atheist, he might perhaps attract their notice, and have the honour to do no little mischief in some of our clubs of young worthies; but from virtue and modesty, clothed in rags, I fear they would not willingly receive

\* Cicero himself acknowledges, that many of the Romans were very incompetent judges of rhetorical merit. — *Hæc turba et barbaria forensis dat locum vel vitiosissimis oratoribus.* De Orat. lib. 1. § 118.

improvement. — The education of the Romans, from the time they began to aspire to a literary character, was similar to that of the Athenians. The children were taught to speak their own language with purity, and made to study and translate the Greek authors. The laws of the twelve tables they committed to memory. And as the talent of public speaking was not only ornamental, but even a necessary qualification, to every man who wished to distinguish himself in a civil or military capacity, all the youth were ambitious to acquire it. The study of the law was also a matter of general concern. Even the children used in their diversions to imitate the procedure of public trials; one accusing, and another defending, the supposed criminal: and the youth, and many of the most respectable statesmen, through the whole of their lives, allotted part of their leisure to the exercise of declaiming on such topics as might come to be debated in the forum, in the senate, or before the judges. Their domestic discipline was very strict. Some ancient matron, of approved virtue, was appointed to superintend the children in their earliest years; before whom every thing criminal in word or deed was avoided as a heinous enormity. This venerable person was careful both to instil good principles into her pupils, and also to regulate their amusements, and, by preserving their minds pure from moral turpitude,

pitude, and intellectual depravation, to prepare them for the study of the liberal arts and sciences. — It may also be remarked; that the Greeks and Romans were more accurate students than the moderns are. They had few books, and those they had were not easily come at: what they read, therefore, they read thoroughly. I know not, whether their way of writing and making up their volumes, as it rendered the perusal more difficult, might not also occasion a more durable remembrance. From their conversation-pieces, and other writings, it appears, that they had a singular facility in quoting their favourite authors. Demosthenes is said to have transcribed Thucydides eight times, and to have got a great part of him by heart. This is a degree of accuracy which the greater part of modern readers have no notion of. We seem to think it more creditable to read many books superficially, than to read a few good ones with care; and yet it is certain, that by the latter method we should cultivate our faculties, and increase our stock of real knowledge, more effectually, and perhaps more speedily, than we can do by the former, which indeed tends rather to bewilder the mind, than to improve it. Every man, who pretends to a literary character, must now read a number of books, whether well or ill written, whether instructive or insignificant, merely that he may have it to say, that he has read them. And therefore I am

apt

apt to think, that, in general, the Greeks and Romans must have been more improved by their reading, than we are by ours. As books multiply, knowledge is more widely diffused; but if human wisdom were to increase in the same proportion, what children would the ancients be, in comparison of the moderns! of whom every subscriber to the circulating library would have it in his power to be wiser than Socrates, and more accomplished than Julius Cæsar!

I mention these particulars of the Greek and Roman discipline, in order to show, that, although the ancients had not so many languages to study as we have, nor so many books to read, they were however careful, that the faculties of their children should neither languish for want of exercise, nor be exhausted in frivolous employment. As we have not thought fit to imitate them in this; as most of the children of modern Europe, who are not obliged to labour for their sustenance, must either study Greek and Latin, or be idle; (for as to cards, and some of the late publications of Voltaire, I do not think the study of either half so useful or so innocent as shuttlecock). — I should be apprehensive, that, if Classical Learning were laid aside, nothing would be substituted in its place, and that our youth would become altogether dissipated. In this respect, therefore, namely, as the means of improving the faculties of the human mind, I do not

2 . see,

see, how the studies of the Grammar-school can be dispensed with. Indeed, if we were, like the savages, continually employed in searching after the necessaries of life; or if, like the first Romans, our situation or temper involved us in perpetual war, I should perhaps allow literary improvement of every kind to be little better than a costly superfluity; and if any one were disposed to affirm, that in such a state men may enjoy a greater share of animal pleasure, than all the ornaments of art and luxury can furnish, I should not be eager to controvert his opinion. But I take for granted, that man is destined for something nobler than mere animal enjoyment; that a state of continual war or unpolished barbarity is unfavourable to our best interests, as rational, moral, and immortal beings; that competence is preferable to want, leisure to tumult, and benevolence to fury: and I speak of the arts, not of supporting, but of adorning human life; not of rendering men insensible to cold and famine; but of enabling them to bear, without being enervated, and enjoy without being corrupted, the blessings of a more prosperous condition.

4. Much has been said, by some writers, on the impropriety of teaching the ancient languages by book, when the modern tongues are most easily acquired, without the help of grammars or dictionaries, by speaking only. Hence it has been proposed, that chil-

dren (to whom the study of grammar is conceived to be a grievous hardship) should learn Latin by being obliged to speak it; for that, however barbarous their style may be at first, it will gradually improve; till at length, though with little knowledge of rules, merely by the force of habit, they attain to such a command of that tongue, as an Englishman may of the French, by residing a few years at Paris. Upon this principle, some projectors have thought of establishing a Latin city, whither children should be sent to learn the language; Montaigne's father made Latin the common dialect of his household \*; and many

\* *Essais de Montaigne*, liv. 2. chap. 17. — On the subject of obliging children to speak Latin before they have acquired a taste in it, I beg leave to quote the following passage from an author, whose judgement in these matters must be allowed to be of the very highest authority.

“ With this way of good understanding the matter,  
 “ plain construing, diligent parsing, daily translating,  
 “ chearful admonishing, and heedful amending of faults,  
 “ never leaving behind just praise for well-doing, I  
 “ would have the scholar brought up withal, till he had  
 “ read and translated over the first book of (Cicero's)  
 “ Epistles chosen out by Sturmius, with a good piece of  
 “ a Comedy of Terence also. — All this while, by  
 “ mine advice, the child shall use to speak no Latin.  
 “ For, as Cicero saith in like matter, with like words,  
 “ *Loquendo, malè loqui discunt*. And that excellent learn-  
 “ ed man G. Budeus, in his Greek commentaries, fore  
 “ complaineth, that when he began to learn the Latin  
 “ tongue, use of speaking Latin at the table, and else-  
 “ where, unadvisedly, did bring him to such an evil  
 “ choice of words, to such a crooked framing of sen-  
 “ tences, that no one thing did hurt or hinder him more

“ all



many philosophers and teachers have laid it down as a rule, that in the grammar-school nothing but Latin or Greek should ever be spoken.

All this, or at least part of it, is very well, if we suppose the sole design of teaching

“ all the days of his life afterward, both for readines  
 “ in speaking, and also good judgement in writing. —  
 “ In very deed, if children were brought up in such  
 “ a house, or such a school, where the Latin tongue  
 “ were properly and perfectly spoken, as Tiberius and  
 “ Caius Gracchii were brought up in their mother Cor-  
 “ nelia’s house; surely then the daily use of speaking  
 “ were the best and readiest way to learn the Latin  
 “ tongue. But now, commonly in the best schools in  
 “ England, for words, right choice is smally regarded,  
 “ true propriety wholly neglected, confusion is brought  
 “ in, barbarousness is bred up so in young wits, as after-  
 “ wards they be not only marred for speaking, but also  
 “ corrupted in judgement, as with much ado, or never  
 “ at all, they be brought to the right frame again. —  
 “ Yet all men covet to have their children speak Latin;  
 “ and so do I very earnestly too. We both have one  
 “ purpose, we agree in desire, we wish one end; but  
 “ we differ somewhat in order and way that leadeth  
 “ rightly to that end. Other would have them speak  
 “ at all adventures: and so they be speaking, to speak,  
 “ the master careth not, the scholar knoweth not, what.  
 “ This is to seem, and not to be; except it be, to be  
 “ bold without shame, rash without skill, full of words  
 “ without wit. I wish to have them speak so, as it may  
 “ well appear, that the brain doth govern the tongue,  
 “ and that reason leadeth forth the talk. — Good under-  
 “ standing must first be bred in the children; which be-  
 “ ing nourished with skill, and use of writing, is the  
 “ only way to bring them to judgement and readines in  
 “ speaking.” *Ascham’s Scholemaster*, book 1. See also  
*Cicero de Orat. lib. 1. § 150. edit. Proust.*

these languages to be, that children may speak and write them as easily and incorrectly, as persons unacquainted with grammar, and with the rules and models of good composition, do commonly speak and write their mother-tongue. But such a talent, though on some rare occasions in life it might be useful, would not be attended with those certain and more immediate advantages, that one has reason to expect from a regular course of classical study. — For, first, one use of classic learning is, to fill up the leisure hours of life with liberal amusement. Now those readers alone can be adequately charmed with beauty of language, who have attended to the rules of good writing, and even to the niceties of grammar. For the mere knowledge of words gives but little pleasure; and they who have gone no deeper in language cannot even conceive the delight wherewith a man of learning peruses an elegant performance. — Secondly, I apprehend, that, in this way of conversation, unless you add to it the study of grammar, and of the best authors, the practice of many years will not make you a competent master in the language. One must always be something of a grammarian to be able thoroughly to understand any well-written book; but before one can enter into the delicacies of expression that are to be met with in every page of a good Latin or Greek author, one must be an accurate grammarian; the complicated inflexions

inflexions and fyntax of thefe elegant tongues giving rife to innumerable fubtleties of connection, and minute varieties of meaning, whereof the fuperficial reader, who thinks grammar below his notice, can have no idea. Befides, the words and phrafes that belong to converfation, are, comparatively fpeaking, not very numerous: unlefs you read poets, orators, hiftorians, and philofophers too, you can never underftand a language in its full extent. In Englifh, Latin, Greek, and Italian, and, I believe, in moft other cultivated tongues, the poetical and rhetorical ftyles differ greatly from that of common difcourfe; and one may be a tolerable proficient in the one, who is very ignorant of the other. — But, thirdly, I would obferve, that the ftudy of a fyftem of grammar, fo complex and fo perfect as the Greek or Latin, may, with peculiar propriety, be recommended to children; being fuited to their underftanding, and having a tendency to promote the improvement of all their mental faculties. In this fcience, abftrufe as it is commonly imagined to be, there are few or no difficulties which a mafter may not render intelligible to any boy of good parts, before he is twelve years old. Words, the matter of this fcience, are within the reach of every child; and of thefe the human mind, in the beginning of life, is known to be fufceptible to an aftonifhing degree: and yet in this fcience there is a fubtlety, and a variety, fufficient to call  
forth

forth all the intellectual powers of the young student. When one hears a boy analyse a few sentences of a Latin author; and show that he not only knows the general meaning, and the import of the particular words, but also can instantly refer each word to its class; enumerate all its terminations, specifying every change of sense, however minute, that may be produced by a change of inflexion or arrangement; explain its several dependencies; distinguish the literal meaning from the figurative, one species of figure from another \*, and even the philosophical use of words

\* The elements of Rhetoric should always be taught in conjunction with those of Grammar. The former would make the latter more entertaining; and, by setting the various parts of language in a new light, would give rise to new energies in the mind of the student, and prepare him for relishing the beauties and practising the rules of good writing; thus heightening the pleasure of study, with little or no increase of labour. I doubt not but Butler's flippant remark, that "All a Rhetorician's rules Consist in naming of his tools," may have brought the art into some disrepute. But though this were a true account, (and it must be a poor system of rhetoric of which this is a true account), the art might have its use notwithstanding. Nobody thinks the time lost to a young seaman, which he employs in acquainting himself with the names and uses of the several parts of a ship, and of the other objects that demand the attention of the mariner: nor is the botanist idle, while he treasures up in his memory the various tribes of vegetables; nor the astronomer, while he numbers the constellations, and learns to call them by their names. In every art there are terms, which must be familiar to those who would understand it, or speak intelligibly about it; and

words from the idiomatical, and the vulgar from the elegant; recollecting occasionally other words and phrases that are synonymous, or contrary, or of different though similar signification; and accounting for what he says, either from the reason of the thing, or by quoting a rule of art, or a classical authority: — one must be sensible, that, by such an exercise, the memory is likely to be more improved in strength and readiness, the attention better fixed, the judgement and taste more successfully exerted, and a habit of reflection and subtle discrimination more easily acquired, than it could be by any other employment equally suited to the capacity of childhood. A year passed in this salutary exercise will be found to cultivate the human faculties more than seven spent in prattling that French which is learned by rote: nor would a complete course of Voltaire yield half so much improvement to a young mind, as a few books of a good Classic au-

and few arts are more complex than literary composition. Besides, though some of the tropes and figures of speech are easily distinguished, others require a more difficult scrutiny, and some knowledge even of the elementary arrangements of philosophy. And the rules for applying the elegancies of language, being founded in the science of human nature, must gradually lead the young rhetorician to attend to what passes in his own mind; which of all the scenes of human observation is the most important, and in the early part of life the least attended to.

thor, of Livy, Cicero, or Virgil, studied in this accurate manner.

I mean not to decry the French tongue, which I know to be useful to all, and necessary to many. Far less would I insinuate any thing to discourage the study of our own, which I think the finest in the world; and which to a member of the British empire is of greater importance than all other languages. I only insist on the expediency of improving young minds by a grammatical study of the Classic tongues; these being at once more *regular* and more *diversified* than any of the modern, and therefore better adapted to the purpose of exercising the *judgement* and the *memory* of the scholar. And I maintain, that every language, and indeed every thing, that is taught children, should be accurately taught; being of opinion, that the mind is more improved by a little accurate knowledge, than by an extensive smattering; and that it would be better for a young man to be master of Euclid or Demosthenes, than to have a whole dictionary of arts and sciences by heart. When he has once got a taste of accuracy, he will know the value and the method of it; and, with a view to the same gratification, will habitually pursue the same method, both in science, and in the general conduct of his affairs: — whereas a habit of superficial thinking perverts and enervates the powers of the soul, leaves many of them to languish in total

tal inactivity ; and is too apt to make a man fickle and thoughtless, unprincipled and dissipated for life.

I agree with Rosseau, that the aim of education should be, to teach us rather *how* to think, than *what* to think ; rather to improve our minds so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of other men. Not that I would discommend the acquisition of good principles, and just notions, from whatever source they are drawn : for indeed the knowledge of the most ingenious man upon earth would be very scanty, if it were all to be derived from himself. Nay, as the parent must in many cases direct the conduct of the child, before the child can discern the reasons of such direction, I am inclined to think, that some important principles of religion and morality may with good success be imprinted on the memory of children, even before they can perfectly understand the arguments by which they may be proved, or the words in which they are expressed. — But still it is true, that a mind prepared by proper discipline for making discoveries of its own, is in a much higher state of cultivation, than that of a mere scholar who knows nothing but what he has been taught. The latter resembles a granary, which may indeed be filled with corn, but can yield no more than it has received ; the former may be likened to a fruitful field, which is ever in a condi-

tion to bring riches and plenty, and multiplies an hundred fold every grain that has been committed to it. Now this peculiar advantage seems to attend the study of the Classic authors, that it not only stores the mind with useful learning, but also begets a habit of attention, and wonderfully improves both the memory and the judgement.

5. That the grammatical art may be learned as perfectly from an English or French, as from a Greek or Latin grammar, no person will affirm, who attends to the subject, and can state the comparison. Classical learning, therefore, is necessary to grammatical skill. And that the knowledge of grammar tends to purify and preserve language, might be proved, if a proof were requisite, from many considerations. Every tongue is incorrect, while it is only spoken; because men never study it grammatically, till after they have begun to write it, or compose in it. And when brought to its highest perfection, by the repeated efforts, and accumulated refinements, of grammarians, lexicographers, philosophers, etymologists, and of authors in general, how incorrectly is it spoken and written by the unlearned! How easily do ungrammatical phrases, the effect of ignorance and affectation, insinuate themselves into common discourse, and thence into writing! and how difficult is it often found, notwithstanding all the remonstrances of learned men, to extirpate those phrases from the

the



the language, or prevail with the public to reform them! Where grammar was accurately studied, language has always been elegant and durable: witness that of ancient Greece, which, though it underwent considerable alterations, as all living languages must do, retained its purity for more than a thousand years. As grammar is neglected, barbarism must prevail. And therefore, the study of Greek and Latin, being necessary to the perfection of the grammatical art, must also be necessary to the permanence and purity even of the modern tongues, and, consequently, to the preservation of our history, poetry, philosophy, and of every thing valuable in our literature. — Can those who wish well to learning or mankind ever seek to depreiate so important a study? Or will it be said, that the knowledge of grammar is unworthy of a gentleman, or man of business, when it is considered, that the most profound statesmen, the ablest orators, the most elegant writers, and the greatest men, that ever appeared on the stage of public life, of whom I shall only mention Julius Cesar and Cicero, were not only studious of grammar, but most accurate grammarians\*?

6. To all this we may add, that the discipline generally established in schools of learning inures the youth to obedience and

\* Quintil. Orat. Inst. lib. 1. cap. 4. See also *Of the origin and progress of language*, vol. 2. p. 494.

subordination; of which it is of infinite consequence to their moral improvement, as well as to the prosperity of their country, that they should early be made sensible. — But is not this discipline often too formal, and too rigorous? And if so, does it not tend to depress the mind, by making it attentive to trifles, and by giving an air of servility to the genius, as well as to the outward behaviour? These questions need no other answer, than the bare recital of a fact, which is obvious to all men; that of all the nations now existing, *that* whose general character partakes the least of finicalness or servility, and which has displayed an elevation of soul, and a spirit of freedom, that is without example in the annals of mankind, is the most remarkable for strictness of discipline in its schools and universities; and seems now to be the only nation upon earth that entertains a proper sense of the unspeakable value of Classic erudition. — A regard to order and lawful authority is as favourable to true greatness of mind, as the knowledge of method is to true genius.

7. Some of my readers will pity, and some probably laugh at me, for what I am going to say in behalf of a practice, which is now in most countries both disused and derided; I mean that of obliging the student to compose some of his exercises in Latin verse. “What! (it will be said), do you, in opposition to the sentiments of antiquity it-  
 “ self,

“ self, and of all wise men in every age, i-  
 “ magine, that a talent for poetry is to be  
 “ communicated by rule, or acquired by ha-  
 “ bit? Or if it could, would you wish to  
 “ see us transformed into a nation of ver-  
 “ sifiers? Poetry may have its use; but it  
 “ will neither fill our warehouses, nor ferti-  
 “ lise our soil, neither rig our fleet, nor re-  
 “ gulate our finances. It has now lost the  
 “ faculty of building towns, felling timber,  
 “ and curing broken bones; and I think it  
 “ was never famous for replenishing either  
 “ the pocket, or the belly. No, no, Sir; a  
 “ garret in Grubstreet, however honourable  
 “ in your eyes, is not the station to which I  
 “ intend to breed my son.”

Permit me to ask in my turn, Whether it is in order to make them authors by trade, or for what other purpose it is, that boys have the task enjoined them, of composing themes and translations, and performing those other exercises, to which writing is necessary. I believe it will be allowed, that habits of accurate thinking, and of speaking correctly and elegantly, are useful and ornamental in every station of life. Now Cicero and Quintilian, and many other authors, affirm, that these habits are most effectually acquired by the frequent use of the pen\*;

\* Cicero de Orat. lib. 1. § 150. Edit. Proust. Quintil. Inst. Or. lib. 10. cap. 3.

not in extracting common places from books\*, but in giving permanence and regularity to our own thoughts expressed in our own words. The themes and translations performed by boys in a grammar-school are the beginnings of this salutary practice; and are known to have a happy effect in forming the judgement, improving the memory, and quickening the invention, of the young student, in giving him a command of words, a correct phraseology, and a habit of thinking with accuracy and method.

Now,

\* To enable us to remember what we read, some authors recommend a book of common-places, wherein we are desired to write down, according to a certain artificial order, all those passages that we wish to add to our stock of learning. But other authors, of equal judgement in these matters, have blamed this practice of writing out quotations. It is certain, that when we read with a view to fill up common-places, we are apt to attend rather to particular passages, than to the scope and spirit of the whole; and that, having transcribed the favourite paragraph, we are not solicitous to remember it, as knowing that we may at any time find it in our common-place book. Besides, life is short, and health precious; and if we do not think more than we either write or read, our studies will avail us little. But this practice of continual transcription consumes time, and impairs health, and yet conveys no improvement to the mind, because it requires no thought, and exercises no faculty. Moreover, it inclines us to form ourselves entirely upon the sentiments of other men; and as different authors think differently on many points, it may make us change our opinions so often, that at last we shall come to have no fixed principle at all.— And yet, on the other hand, it must be allowed, that many things occur,  
both

Now, as the design of these exercises is not to make men professed prose-authors, so neither is the practice of versifying intended to make them poets. I do not wish the numbers of versifiers to multiply; I shall, if you please, admit the old maxim, “*Poeta nascitur, non fit;*” and that it would be as easy to soften marble into pincushions as to communicate the art of poetry to one who wants the genius :

— Ego nec studium sine divite vena,  
Nec rude quid possit video ingenium. —

The practice in question may, however, in my judgement, be attended with some good effects. — First, though we have for ever

both in reading and in experience, which ought not to be forgotten, and yet cannot be preserved, unless committed to writing. Perhaps, then, it is best to follow a middle course; and, when we register facts or sentiments that occur in reading, to throw aside the author from whom we take them, and do it in our own words. In this way writing is profitable, because it is attended with thought and recollection, as well as practice in composition. And when we are so much masters of the sentiments of another man as to be able to express them with accuracy in our own words, then we may be said to have digested them, and made them our own; and then it is, and not before, that our understanding is really improved by them. If we chuse to preserve a specimen of an author’s style, or to transcribe any of his thoughts in his own words on account of something that pleases in the expression, there can be no harm in this, provided we do not employ too much time in it.

lost the true pronounciation of Latin and Greek, yet the less false our pronounciation is, the more agreeable and intelligible it will probably be. Versification, therefore, considered as an exercise for exemplifying and fixing in the mind the rules of prosody, may be allowed to have its use in correcting the pronounciation. — But, secondly, it has a further use, in heightening the charms of poetical composition, by improving our sense of poetical harmony. I have already mentioned amusement as one of the advantages of classic learning. Now good poetry is doubly amusing to a reader who has studied and practised versification; as the shapes and colours of animal and vegetable nature seem doubly beautiful to the eye of a painter. “I begin,” says Pope, speaking of his proficiency in drawing, “to discover beauties that were till now imperceptible to me. Every corner of an eye, or turn of a nose or ear, the smallest degree of light or shade on a cheek or in a dimple, have charms to distract me\*.” For the same reason, therefore, that I would recommend drawing to him who wishes to acquire a true taste for the beauties of nature, I should recommend a little practice in versifying to those who would be thoroughly sensible to the charm of poetic numbers. — Thirdly, this practice is still more important, as it gradually sup-

\* Pope's Letters to Gay.

plies the student with a store of words; thereby facilitating the acquisition of the language: and as it accustoms him to exert his judgement and taste, as well as memory, in the choice of harmonious and elegant expressions. By composing in prose, he learns to think and speak methodically; and his poetical exercises under a proper direction, will make the ornaments of language familiar to him, and give precision to his thoughts, and a vigorous brevity to his style. These advantages may, I presume, be in some degree attained, though his verses, unaided by genius, should never rise above mediocrity: if the muses are propitious, his improvement will be proportionably greater.

But is not this exercise too difficult? — and does it not take up too much time? — Too much time it ought not to take up; nor should it be imposed on those who find it too difficult. But if we consult experience, we shall find, that boys of ordinary talents are capable of it, and that it never has on any occasion proved detrimental to literature. I know several learned men who were inured to it in their youth; but I never heard them complain of its unprofitableness or difficulty: and I cannot think, that Grotius or Buchanan, Milton or Addison, Browne or Gray\*, had ever any reason to lament, as

\* [See next page.]

lost, the hours they employed in this exercise. It is generally true; that genius displays itself to the best advantage in its native tongue. Yet is it to be wished, that the talent of writing Latin verse were a little more cultivated among us; for it has often proved the means of extending the reputation of our authors, and consequently of adding something to the literary glories of Great Britain. Boileau is said not to have known that there were any good poets in England, till Addison made him a present of the *Muse Anglicane*. Many of the finest performances of Pope, Dryden, and Milton, have appeared not ungracefully in a Roman dress. And those foreigners must entertain a high opinion of our Pastoral poetry, who have seen the Latin translations of Vincent Bourne, particularly those of the ballads of *Tweedside*, *William and Margaret*, and Rowe's *Despairing beside a clear stream*; of which it is no compliment to say, that in sweetness of numbers,

[See the reference-mark in the preceding page.]

\* Isaac Hawkins Browne, Esq; author of several excellent poems, particularly one in Latin, on the Immortality of the soul; of which Mrs Carter justly says, that it does honour to our country. — Mr Gray of Cambridge, the author of the finest odes, and of the finest moral elegy in the world, wrote many elegant Latin poems in his youth, with some of which Mr Mason has lately obliged the public. The Latin poems of Grotius and Buchanan, Milton and Addison, have long been universally known and admired.

and



and elegant expression, they are at least equal to the originals, and scarce inferior to any thing in Ovid or Tibullus.

Enough, I hope, has been said to evince the utility of that mode of discipline which for the most part is, and always, in my opinion, ought to be, established in grammar-schools. If the reader admit the truth of these remarks, he will be satisfied, that “the study of the classic authors does not necessarily oblige the student to employ too much time in the acquisition of words :” for that by means of those words the mind may be stored with valuable knowledge ; and that the acquisition of them, prudently conducted, becomes to young persons one of the best instruments of intellectual proficiency, which in the present state of human society it is possible to imagine.

II. I need not spend much time in refuting the second objection, “That these languages, when acquired, are not worth the labour.” There never was a man of learning and taste, who would not deny the fact. Those persons are most delighted with the ancient writers, who understand them best ; and none affect to despise them, but they who are ignorant of their value. — Whether the pleasure and profit arising from the knowledge of the Classic tongues is sufficient to repay the toil of acquiring them, is a point which those only who have made the acquisition are entitled to determine. And they,

we are sure, will determine in the affirmative. The admirer of Homer and Demosthenes, Virgil and Cicero, Xenophon and Cesar, Herodotus and Livy, will tell us, that he would not for any consideration give up his skill in the language of those authors. Every man of learning wishes, that his son may be learned; and that not so much from a view to pecuniary advantage, as from a desire to have him supplied with the means of useful instruction and liberal amusement. It is true, that habit will make us fond of trifling pursuits, and mistake imaginary for real excellence. The being accustomed to that kind of study, and perhaps also the pride, or the vanity, or simply the consciousness, of being learned, may account for part of the pleasure that attends the perusal of the Greek and Roman writings. But sure it is but a small part which may be thus accounted for. The Greeks were more passionate admirers of Homer and Demosthenes, and the Romans of Virgil and Cicero, than we; and yet were not under the necessity of employing so much time in the study of these authors, nor, consequently, so liable to contract a liking from long acquaintance, or to be proud of an accomplishment which was common to them with all their countrymen.

The knowledge of the classics is the best foundation to the study of Law, Physic, Theology, Rhetoric, Agriculture, and other honourable arts and sciences. In polite nations,

tions, and in companies where the rational character is held in any esteem, it has generally been regarded as a recommendatory talent. As a source of recreation, for filling up the intervals of leisure, its importance has been acknowledged by many names of the highest authority. And surely the Muses are more elegant, more instructive, and more pleasing companions, than dogs, horses, gamblers, or fots: and in attending to the wisdom of former ages, we may reasonably be thought to pass our time to better purpose, than in hearing or helping about the censures, calumnies, and other follies, of the present.

III. It has been said, that "school-learning has a tendency to encumber the genius, and, consequently, to weaken rather than improve the mind." Here opens another field for declamation. Who has not heard the learned formality of Ben Johnson opposed to Shakespeare's "native wood-notes wild;" and inferences made from the comparison, very much to the discredit, not of the learned poet only, but of learning itself? Milton, too, is thought by some to have possessed a superfluity of erudition, as well as to have been too ostentatious in displaying it. And the ancients are supposed to have derived great benefit from their not being obliged, as we are, to study a number of languages.

It is true, a man may be so intemperate in  
reading,

reading, as to hurt both his body and his mind. They who always read, and never think, become pedants and changelings. And those who employ the best part of their time in learning languages, are rarely found to make proficiency in art or science. To gain a perfect knowledge even of one tongue, is a work of much labour; though some men have such a talent this way as to acquire, with moderate application, a competent skill in several. Milton, before he was twenty years old, had composed verses in Latin, Italian, and Greek, as well as in English. But the generality of minds are not equal to this; nor is it necessary they should. One may be very sensible of the beauties of a foreign tongue, and may read it with ease and pleasure, who can neither speak it, nor compose in it. And, except where the genius has a facility in acquiring them, and a strong bias to that sort of study, I would not recommend it to a young man to make himself master of many languages. For, surely, to be able to express the same thought in the dialogues of ten different nations, is not the end for which man was sent into the world.

The present objection, as well as the former, is founded on what every man of letters would call a mistake of fact. No person who understands Greek and Latin will ever admit, that these languages can be an incumbrance to the mind. And perhaps it would be difficult to prove, even by a single instance,

instance, that genius was ever hurt by learning. Ben Johnson's misfortune was, not that he knew too much, but that he could not make a proper use of his knowledge; a misfortune, which arose rather from a defect of genius or taste, than from a superabundance of erudition. With the same genius, and less learning, he would probably have made a worse figure. — His play of Cati-line is an ill-digested collection of facts and passages from Sallust. Was it his knowledge of Greek and Latin that prevented his making a better choice? To comprehend every thing the historian has recorded of that incendiary, it is not requisite that one should be a great scholar. By looking into Rose's translation, any man who understands English may make himself master of the whole narrative in half a day. It was Johnson's want of taste, that made him transfer from the history to the play some passages and facts that suit not the genius of dramatic writing: it was want of taste, that made him dispose his materials according to the historical arrangement; which, however favourable to calm information, is not calculated for working those effects on the passions and fancy, which it is the aim of tragedy to produce. It was the same want of taste, that made him, out of a rigid attachment to historical truth, lengthen his piece with super-numerary events inconsistent with the unity of design, and not subservient to the catastrophe;

strophe; and it was doubtless owing to want of invention, that he confined himself so strictly to the letter of the story. Had he recollected the advice of Horace, (of which he could not be ignorant, as he translated the whole poem into English verse), he must have avoided some of these faults:

Publica materies privati juris erit, si  
 Non circa vilem patulumque moraberis orbem,  
 Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus  
 Interpres; nec desilies imitator in arctum,  
 Unde pedem proferre pudor vetat, aut operis  
 lex\*.

A little more learning, therefore, or rather a more seasonable application of what he had, would have been of great use to the author on this occasion. — Shakespeare's play of Julius Cæsar is founded on Plutarch's life of Brutus. The poet has adopted many of the incidents and speeches recorded by the historian, whom he had read in Sir Thomas North's translation. But great judgement appears in the choice of passages. Those events and sentiments that either are affecting in themselves, or contribute to the display of human characters and passions, he has adopted; what seemed unsuitable to the drama is omitted. By reading Plutarch and Sophocles in the original, together with the

\* Ar. Poet. vers. 135. See Dr Hurd's elegant commentary and notes.

Poetics of Aristotle and Horace's epistle to the Pisoes, Shakespeare might have made this tragedy better; but I cannot conceive how such a preparation, had the poet been capable of it, could have been the cause of his making it worse. It is very probable, that the instance of Shakespeare may have induced some persons to think unfavourably of the influence of learning upon genius; but a conclusion so important should never be inferred from one instance, especially when that is allowed to be extraordinary, and almost supernatural. From the phenomena of so transcendent a genius, we must not judge of human nature in general; no more than we are to take the rules of British agriculture from what is practised in the Summer Islands. — Nor let it be any objection to the utility of classic learning, that we often meet with men of excellent parts, whose faculties were never improved, either by the doctrine or by the discipline of the schools. A practice which is not indispensably necessary, may yet be highly useful. We have heard of merchants, who could hardly write or read, superintending an extensive commerce, and acquiring great wealth and esteem by the most honourable means: yet who will say, that Writing and Reading are not useful to the merchant? There have been men eminent both for genius and for virtue, who in the beginning of life were almost totally neglected: yet who will say, that the care of parents,

and early habits of virtue and reflection, are not of infinite importance to the human mind?

Milton was one of the most learned men this nation ever produced. But his great learning neither impaired his judgement, nor checked his imagination. A richer vein of invention, as well as a more correct taste, appears in the *Paradise Lost*, written when he was near sixty years of age, than in any of his earlier performances. *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, which were his last works; are not so full of imagery, nor admit so much fancy, as many of his other pieces; but they discover a consummate judgement; and little is wanting to make each of them perfect in its kind. — I am not offended at that profusion of learning which here and there appears in the *Paradise Lost*. It gives a classical air to the poem: it refreshes the mind with new ideas; and there is something, in the very sound of the names of places and persons whom he celebrates, that is wonderfully pleasing to the ear. Admit all this to be no better than pedantic superfluity; yet will it not follow, that Milton's learning did him any harm upon the whole, provided it appear to have improved him in matters of higher importance. And that it did so, is undeniable. This poet is not more eminent for strength and sublimity of genius, than for the art of his composition; which he owed partly to a fine taste  
in



in harmony, and partly to his accurate knowledge of the ancients. The style of his numbers has not often been imitated with success. It is not merely the want of rhyme, nor the diversified position of pauses, nor the drawing out of the sense from one line to another; far less is it the mixture of antiquated words and strange idioms, that constitutes the charm of Milton's versification; though many of his imitators, when they copy him in these or in some of these respects, think they have acquitted themselves very well. But one must study the best Classic authors with as much critical skill as Milton did, before one can pretend to rival him in the art of harmonious writing. For, after all the rules that can be given, there is something in this art, which cannot be acquired but by a careful study of the ancient masters, particularly Homer, Demosthenes, Plato, Cicero, and Virgil; every one of whom, or at least the two first and the last, it would be easy to prove, that Milton has imitated, in the construction of his numbers. — In a word, we have good reason to conclude, that Milton's genius, instead of being overloaded or encumbered, was greatly improved, enriched, and refined, by his learning. At least we are sure this was his own opinion. Never was there a more indefatigable student. And from the superabundance of Classic allusions to be met with in every page of his poetry, we may guess how highly he

valued the literature of Greece and Rome, and how frequently he meditated upon it.

Spenser was learned in Latin and Greek, as well as in Italian. But either the fashion of the times, or some deficiency in his own taste, inclined him to prefer the modern to the ancient models. His genius was comprehensive and sublime, his style copious, his sense of harmony delicate : and nothing seems to have been wanting to make him a poet of the highest rank, but a more intimate acquaintance with the classic authors. We may at least venture to say, that if he had been a little more conversant in these, he would not, in his *Shepherd's Calendar*, have debased the tenderneſs of pastoral with the impure mixture of theological diſputation ; nor would he have been ſo intoxicated with the ſplendid faults of the *Orlando Furioſo*, as to conſtruct his *Fairy Queen* on that Gothic model, rather than according to the plan which Homer invented, and which Virgil and Taſſo (who were alſo favourites with our author) had ſo happily imitated. It is ſaid to be on account of the purity of his ſtyle, and the variety of his invention, and not for any thing admirable in his plan, that the Italians in general prefer Arioſto to Taſſo \* : — and indeed we can hardly conceive, how

\* The Academicians *della Cruſca* published criticisms on Taſſo's *Gieruſalemme Liberata* ; but thoſe related chiefly to the language, and were founded in too rigorous a partiality

how a tale so complex and so absurd, so heterogeneous in its parts, and so extravagant as a whole, should be more esteemed than a simple, probable, perspicuous, and interesting fable. Yet Spenser gave the preference to the former; a fact so extraordinary, considering his abilities in other respects, that we cannot account for it, without supposing it to have been partly the effect of a bias contracted by long acquaintance. And if so, have we not reason to think, that if he had been but equally conversant with better patterns, his taste would have acquired a different and better direction?

Dryden's knowledge of foreign and ancient languages did not prevent his being a perfect master of his own. No author ever had a more exquisite sense of the energy and beauty of English words; though it cannot be denied, that his aversion to words of foreign original, and his desire on all occasions to do honour to his mother-tongue, betrays him frequently into mean phrases and vulgar idioms. His unhappy circumstances, or rather perhaps the fashion of his age, alike un-

tiality for the Florentine dialect. But "the magnificence of Tasso's numbers and diction, together with his great conformity to Epic rules, will for ever overbalance Ariosto's superior gracefulness and rapidity of expression, and greater fertility of invention. The *Jerusalem* will always be the more striking, and the *Orlando* the more pleasing of the two poems."

*Baretti on Italy, vol. 1. p. 252.*

friendly

friendly to good morals and good writing, did not permit him to avail himself of his great learning so much as might have been expected. The author of *Polymetis* has proved him guilty of many mistakes in regard to the ancient mythology: and I believe it will be allowed, by all his impartial readers, that a little more learning, or something of a more classical taste, would have been of great use to him, as it was to his illustrious imitator.

I know not whether any nation ever produced a more singular genius than Cowley. He abounds in tender thoughts, beautiful lines, and emphatical expressions. His wit is inexhaustible, and his learning extensive; but his taste is generally barbarous, and seems to have been formed upon such models as Donne, Martial, and the worst parts of Ovid: nor is it possible to read his longer poems with pleasure, while we retain any relish for the simplicity of ancient composition. If this author's ideas had been fewer, his conceits would have been less frequent; so that in one respect learning may be said to have hurt his genius. Yet it does not appear, that his Greek and Latin did him any harm; for his imitations of Anacreon are almost the only parts of him that are now remembered or read. His *Davideis*, and his translations of Pindar, are destitute of harmony, simplicity, and every other Classical grace. Had his inclinations led him to a frequent perusal  
of

of the most elegant authors of antiquity, his poems would certainly have been the better for it.

It was never said, nor thought, that Swift, Pope, or Addison \*, impaired their genius by too close an application to Latin and Greek. On the contrary, we have reason to ascribe to their knowledge of these tongues, that classical purity of style by which their writings are distinguished. All our most eminent philosophers and divines, Bacon, Newton, Cud-

\* “ Mr Addison employed his first years in the study  
 “ of the old Greek and Roman writers; whose language  
 “ and manner he caught at that time of life, as strongly  
 “ as other young people gain a French accent, or a gentle  
 “ air. An early acquaintance with the Classics is  
 “ what may be called the good-breeding of poetry, as  
 “ it gives a certain gracefulness which never forsakes a  
 “ mind that contracted it in youth, but is seldom or never  
 “ hit by those who would learn it too late. He first  
 “ distinguished himself by his Latin compositions, published  
 “ in the *Musæ Anglicanæ*; and was admired as  
 “ one of the best authors since the Augustan age, in the  
 “ two Universities, and the greatest part of Europe, before  
 “ he was talked of as a poet in town. There is not  
 “ perhaps any harder task than to tame the natural wildness  
 “ of wit, and to civilize the fancy. The generality  
 “ of our old English poets abound in forced conceits and  
 “ affected phrases; and even those who are said to come  
 “ the nearest to exactness are but too often fond of un-  
 “ natural beauties, and aim at something better than per-  
 “ fection. If Mr Addison’s example and precepts be the  
 “ occasion, that there now begins to be a great demand  
 “ for correctness, we may justly attribute it to his be-  
 “ ing first fashioned by the ancient models, and familiar-  
 “ ized to propriety of thought, and chastity of style.”

*Tickel’s Account of the life and writings of Addison.*

worth,

worth, Hooker, Taylor, Atterbury, Stillingfleet, were profoundly skilled in ancient literature. And every rational admirer of Mr Locke will acknowledge, that if his learning had been equal to his good sense and manly spirit, his works would have been still more creditable to himself, and more useful to mankind.

In writings of wit and humour, one would be apt to think, that there is no great occasion for the knowledge of antiquity; it being the author's chief aim and business, to accommodate himself to the manners of the present time. And if study be detrimental to any faculty of the mind, we might suspect, that a playful imagination, the parent of wit and humour, would be most likely to suffer by it. Yet the history of our first-rate geniuses in this way (Shakespeare always excepted) is a proof of the contrary. There is more learning, as well as more wit, in *Hudibras*, than in any book of the same size now extant. In the *Tale of a Tub*, the *Tatler*, and the *Spectator*, the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, and in many parts of *Fielding*, we discover at once a brilliant wit and copious erudition.

I have confined these brief remarks to English writers. But the same thing might be proved by examples from every literary nation of modern, and even of ancient Europe. For we must not suppose, that the Greek and Latin authors, because they did not study

many languages, were illiterate men. Homer and Virgil were skilled in all the learning of their time. The men of letters in those days were capable of more intense application, and had a greater thirst of knowledge, than the generality of the moderns; and would often, in defiance of poverty, fatigue, and danger, travel into distant lands, and visit famous places and persons, to qualify themselves for instructing mankind. And, however learned we may be in modern writings, our curiosity can hardly fail to be raised in regard to the ancient, when we consider, that the greater part of these were the work, and contain the thoughts of men, who had themselves been engaged in the most eventful scenes of active life; while most modern books contain only the notions of speculative writers, who know but the theory of business, and that but imperfectly, and whose determinations upon the principles of great affairs, and the feelings and sentiments peculiar to active life, are little better than conjecture. — At any rate, may we not affirm, that “without the aid of ancient learning, genius cannot hope to rise to those honours to which it is entitled, nor to reach that perfection to which it naturally aspires?” The exceptions are so few, and so singular, that it is unnecessary to insist upon them.

Were we to consider this matter abstractly, we should be led to the same conclusion.

For what is the effect of learning upon a sound mind? Is it not to enlarge our stock of ideas; to ascertain and correct our experimental knowledge; to give us habits of attention, recollection, and observation; and help us to methodise our thoughts, whether acquired or natural, as well as to express them with perspicuity and elegance? This may give a direction to our inventive powers, but surely cannot weaken them. The very worst effect that Classical learning can produce on the intelligent mind, is, that it may sometimes transform an original genius into an imitator. Yet this happens not often; and when it does happen, we ought not perhaps to complain. Ingenious imitations may be as delightful, and as useful, as original compositions. One would not exchange Virgil's *Georgic* for twenty such poems as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, nor Pope's *Eloisa* for all the *Epistles* of Ovid. The sixth book of the *Æneid*, though an imitation of the eleventh of the *Odyssey*, is incomparably more sublime; and the night-adventure of Diomedes and Ulysses, excellent as it is, must be allowed to be inferior to the episode of Nisus and Euryalus. Several cantos might be mentioned of the *Fairy Queen*, the preservation of which would not compensate the loss of *The Castle of Indolence*: and notwithstanding the merit of Cervantes, I believe there are few Critics in Great Britain, who do not think in their hearts, that Fielding has outdone his master.

While



While the literary world can boast of such imitators as Virgil and Taffo, Boileau and Pope, it has no great reason to lament the scarcity of original writers.

IV. The fourth and last objection to the study of Latin and Greek, “ That the Classic authors contain descriptions and doctrines, that tend to seduce the understanding, and corrupt the heart,” — is unhappily founded in truth. And indeed, in most languages there are too many books liable to this censure. And, though a melancholy truth, it is however true, that a young man, in his closet, and at a distance from bad example, if he has the misfortune to fall into a certain track of study which at present is not unfashionable, may debase his understanding, corrupt his heart, and learn the rudiments of almost every depravation incident to human nature. But to effect this, the knowledge of modern tongues is alone sufficient. Immoral and impious writing is one of those arts in which the moderns are confessedly superior to the Greeks and Romans.

It does not appear, from what remains of their works, that any of the old philosophers ever went so far as some of the modern, in recommending irreligion and immorality. The Pagan theology is too absurd to lessen our reverence for the Gospel; but some of our philosophers, as we are pleased to call them, have been labouring hard, and I fear not without success, to make mankind re-

nounce all regard for religious truth, both natural and revealed. Jupiter and his kindred gods may pass for machines in an ancient Epic poem; but in a modern one they would be ridiculous, even in that capacity: a proof, that in spite of the enchanting strains wherein their achievements are celebrated, they have lost all credit and consideration in the world, and that the idolatrous fables of classical poetry can never more do any harm. From the scepticism of Pyrrho, and the Atheism of Epicurus, what danger is now to be apprehended! The language of Empiricus, and the poetry of Lucretius, may claim attention; but the reasonings of both the one and the other are too childish to subvert any sound principle, or corrupt any good heart; and would probably have been forgotten or despised long ago, if some worthy authors of these latter times had not taken pains to revive and recommend them. The parts of ancient science that are, and always have been, studied most, are the Peripatetic and Stoical systems; and these may undoubtedly be read, not only without danger, but even with great benefit both to the heart and to the understanding.

The finest treatises of Pagan morality are indeed imperfect; but their authors are entitled to honour, for a good intention, and for having done their best. Error in that science, as well as in theology, though in us the effect of prejudice and pride, was generally

rally in them the effect of ignorance: and those of them, whose names are most renowned, and whose doctrines are best understood, as Socrates, Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Epictetus, and Antoninus, have probably done, and still may do, service to mankind, by the importance of their precepts, by their amiable pictures of particular virtues, and by the pathetic admonitions and apposite examples and reasonings wherewith their morality is enforced. Love to their country; the parental, filial, and conjugal charities; resignation to the Divine will; superiority to the evils of life, and to the gifts of fortune; the laws of justice, the rights of human nature; the dignity of temperance, the baseness of sensuality, the proper direction of fortitude, and a generous, candid, and friendly behaviour, are enjoined in their writings with a warmth of expression, and force of argument, which a Christian moralist might be proud to imitate. — In a word, I think it may be affirmed with confidence, that the knowledge of ancient philosophy and history must contribute to the improvement of the human mind, but cannot now corrupt the heart or understanding of any person who is a friend to truth and virtue.

But what have you to say in vindication of the indecency of the ancient poets, of Aristophanes, Catullus, Ovid, Martial, Petronius, and even of Persius, Juvenal, and Horace?

race? Truly, not a word. I abandon every thing of that sort, whether modern or ancient, to the utmost vengeance of Satire and Criticism; and should rejoice to hear, that from the monuments of human wit all indecency were expunged for ever. Nor is there any circumstance that could attend such a purification, that would make me regret it. The immoral passages in most of the authors now mentioned are but few, and have neither elegance nor harmony to recommend them to any but profligates:—so strict is the connection between virtue and good taste; and so true it is, that want of decency will always in one degree or other betray want of sense. Horace, Persius, Martial, Catullus, and Ovid himself, might give up all their immoralities, without losing any of their wit:—and as to Aristophanes and Petronius, I have never been able to discover any thing in either, that might not be consigned to eternal oblivion, without the least detriment to literature. The latter, notwithstanding the name which he has, I know not how, acquired, is in every respect (with the reserve of a few tolerable verses scattered through his book) a vile writer; his style harsh and affected; and his argument such as can excite no emotion, in any mind not utterly depraved, but contempt and abhorrence. The wit and humour of the Athenian poet are now become almost invisible, and seem never to have been very conspicuous.

The

The reception he met with in his own time was probably owing to the licentiousness of his manners, and the virulence of his defamation, (qualities which have given a temporary name to more bad poets than one); and for his reputation in latter times, as a classic author, he must have been indebted, not to the poignancy of his wit, or the delicacy of his humour, nor to his powers of invention and arrangement, nor to any natural display of human manners to be found in him, (for of all this merit he seems to be destitute), but solely to the antiquity of his language. In proof of one part of this remark, it may be observed, that Plato in his *Symposium* describes him as a glutton, drunkard, and profligate: and to evince the probability of another part of it, I need only mention the excessive labour and zeal wherewith commentators have illustrated certain Greek and Latin performances, which if they had been written in our days would never have been read, and which cannot boast of any excellence, either in the sentiment or composition.

But do you really think, that such mutilations of the old poets, as you seem to propose, can ever take place? Do you think, that the united authority of all the potentates on earth could annihilate, or consign to oblivion, those exceptionable passages? — I do not: but I think that those passages should never be explained, nor put in the hands of children.

children. And sure, it is not necessary that they should. In some late editions of Horace, the impurities are omitted, and not so much left as a line of asterisks, to raise a boy's curiosity. By the attention of parents and teachers, might not all the poets usually read in schools be printed in the same manner? Might not children be informed, that, in order to become learned, it is necessary to read, not every Greek and Latin book, but those books only that may mend the heart, improve the taste, and enlarge the understanding? Might they not be made sensible of the importance of Bacon's aphorism, "That some books are to be tasted, others  
" to be swallowed, and some few to be  
" chewed and digested?" — that is, as the Noble author explains it, "That some are to  
" be read only in parts; others to be read,  
" but not curiously; and some few to be  
" read wholly with diligence and attention?" — a rule, which, if duly attended to, would greatly promote the advancement of true learning, and the pleasure and profit of the student. Might not a young man be taught to set a proper value on good compositions, and to entertain such contempt for the bad, as would secure him against their influence? All this I cannot but think practicable, if those who superintend education would study to advance the moral as well as intellectual improvement of the scholar; and if teachers, translators, and commentators, would  
consider,

consider, that to explain dulness is foolish, and to illustrate obscenity criminal. And if all this were practised, we should have no reason to complain, of classical erudition, that it has any tendency to seduce the understanding, or inflame the passions. In fact, its inflammatory and seductive qualities would never have been alarming, if commentators had thought more, and written less. But they were unhappily too wise to value any thing beyond the knowledge of old words. To have told them, that it is essential to all good writing to improve as well as inform, and to regulate the affections as well as amuse the fancy and enrich the memory; that wicked books can please none but worthless men, who have no right to be pleased, and that their authors instead of praise deserve punishment; — would have been to address them in a style, which with all their knowledge of the grammar and dictionary they could not have understood\*.

Still

\* It must move the indignation of every person who is not an arrant bookworm, or abandoned debauchee, to observe how industriously Johannes Doufa, and others of that phlegmatic brotherhood, have expounded the indecencies of Greece and Rome, and dragged into light those abominations that ought to have remained in utter darkness for ever. — Mons. Nodot, a critic of the last century, on occasion of having recovered, as he pretends, a part of an ancient manuscript, writes to Mons. Charpentier, Directeur de l'Academie Française, in the following terms. “ J'ai fait, Monsieur, une decouverte

Still I shall be told, that this scheme, tho' practicable, is too difficult to permit the hope of its being ever put in execution. Perhaps it may be so. And what then? Because passages that convey improper ideas may be found in some ancient writings, shall we deprive young people of all the instruction and pleasure that attends a regular course of classical study? Because Horace wrote some paultry lines, and Ovid some worthless poems, must Virgil, and Livy, and Cicero, and Plutarch, and Homer, be consigned to oblivion? I do not here speak of the beauties of the Greek and Latin authors, nor of the vast disproportion there is between what is good in them, and what is bad. In every thing human there is a mixture of evil: but are we

tres-avantageuse a l'empire des lettres: et pour ne pas tenir votre esprit en suspens, plein de la joye que je ressens moi-meme, je vous dirai avec precipitation, que j'ai entre mes mains ce qui manquoit de — —. Vous pouvez croire, Monsieur, si aimant cet auteur au point que je fais — &c. Vous appercevrez, Monsieur, dans cet ouvrage des beautès qui vous charmeront. — Je vous prie d'annoncer cette decouverte a vos illustres Academiciens; elle merite bien, qu'ils la sçachent des premiers. Je suis ravi que la fortune se soit servié de moi, pour rendre a la posterite un ouvrage si precieux," &c. If the lost Decades of Livy had been recovered, this zealous Frenchman could hardly have expressed himself with more enthusiasm. What then will the reader think when he is told, that this wonderful accession to literature, was no other than Petronius Arbiter; an author, whom it is impossible to read without intense disgust, and whom, if he be ancient, (which is not certain), I scruple not to call a disgrace to antiquity?

for



for that reason to throw off all concern about human things? Must we set our harvests on fire, or leave them to perish, because a few tares have sprung up with the corn? Because oppression will sometimes take place where-ever there is subordination, and luxury where-ever there is security, are we therefore to renounce all government? — or shall we, according to the advice of certain famous projectors, run naked to the woods, and there encounter every hardship and brutality of savage life, in order to escape from the tooth-ach and rheumatism? If we reject every useful institution that may possibly be attended with inconvenience, we must reject all bodily exercise, and all bodily rest, all arts and sciences, all law, commerce, and society.

If the present objection prove any thing decisive against ancient literature, it will prove a great deal more against the modern. Of classical indecency compared with that of latter times, I do not think so favourably as did a certain critic, who likened the former to the nakedness of a child, and the latter to that of a prostitute; I think there is too much of the last character in both: but that the modern muses partake of it more than the ancient, is undeniable. I do not care to prove what I say, by a detail of particulars; and am sorry to add, that the point is too plain to require proof. And if so, may not an early acquaintance with the best

ancient authors, as teachers of wisdom, and models of good taste, be highly useful as a preservative from the sophistries and immoralities that disgrace some of our fashionable moderns? If a true taste for Classic learning shall ever become general, the demand for licentious plays, poems, and novels, will abate in proportion; for it is to the more illiterate readers that this sort of trash is most acceptable. Study, so ignominious and so debasing, so unworthy of a scholar and of a man, so repugnant to good taste and good manners, will hardly engage the attention of those who can relish the original magnificence of Homer and Virgil, Demosthenes and Cicero.

A book is of some value, if it yield harmless amusement; it is still more valuable, if it communicate instruction; but if it answer both purposes, it is truly a matter of importance to mankind. That many of the classic authors possessed the art of blending sweetness with utility, has been the opinion of all men without exception, who had sense and learning sufficient to qualify them to be judges. — Is history instructive and entertaining? We have from these authors a detail of the most important events unfolded in the most interesting manner. Without the histories they have left us, we should have been both ignorant of their affairs, and unskilled in the art of recording our own: for I think it is allowed, that the best modern

dern histories are those which in form are most similar to the ancient models. — Is philosophy a source of improvement and delight? The Greeks and Romans have given us, I shall not say the most useful, but I will say the fundamental, part of human science; have led us into a train of thinking, which of ourselves we should not so soon have taken to; and have set before us an endless multitude of examples and inferences, which, though not exempt from error, do however suggest the proper methods of observation and profitable inquiry. Let those, who undervalue the discoveries of antiquity, only think, what our condition at this day must have been, if, in the ages of darkness that followed the destruction of the Roman empire, all the literary monuments of Greece and Italy had perished. — Again, is there any thing productive of utility and pleasure, in the fictions of poetry, and in the charms of harmonious composition? Surely, it cannot be doubted; nor will they, who have any knowledge of the history of learning, hesitate to affirm, that the modern Europeans are almost wholly indebted for the beauty of their writings both in prose and verse, to those models of elegance that first appeared in Greece, and have since been admired and imitated all over the western world. It is a striking fact, that while in other parts of the earth there prevails a form of language, so disguised by figures, and so darkened by incoherence,

incoherence, as to be quite unfuitable to philosophy, and even in poetry tiresome, the Europeans should have been so long in possession of a style, in which harmony, perspicuity, simplicity, and elegance, are so happily united. That the Romans and modern Europeans had it from the Greeks, is well known; but whence those fathers of literature derived it, is not so apparent, and would furnish matter for too long a digression, if we were here to inquire. — In a word, the Greeks and Romans are our masters in all polite literature; a consideration, which of itself ought to inspire reverence for their writings and genius.

Good translations are very useful; but the best of them will not render the study of the original authors either unnecessary or unprofitable. This might be proved by many arguments.

All living languages are liable to change. The Greek and Latin, though composed of more durable materials than ours, were subject to perpetual vicissitude, till they ceased to be spoken. The former is with reason believed to have been more stationary than any other; and indeed a very particular attention was paid to the preservation of it: yet between Spenser and Pope, Hooker and Sherlock, Raleigh and Smollet, a difference of dialect is not more perceptible, than between Homer and Apollonius, Xenophon and Plutarch, Aristotle and Antoninus. In  
the

the Roman authors the change of language is still more remarkable. How different, in this respect, is Ennius from Virgil, Lucilius from Horace, Cato from Columella, and even Catullus from Ovid ! The laws of the Twelve Tables, though studied by every Roman of condition, were not perfectly understood even by antiquarians, in the time of Cicero, when they were not quite four hundred years old. Cicero himself, as well as Lucretius, made several improvements in the Latin tongue ; Virgil introduced some new words ; and Horace asserts his right to the same privilege ; and from his remarks upon it \*, appears to have considered the immutability of living language as an impossible thing. It were vain then to flatter ourselves with the hope of permanency to any of the modern tongues of Europe ; which, being more ungrammatical than the Latin and Greek, are exposed to more dangerous, because less discernible innovations. Our want of tenses and cases makes a multitude of auxiliary words necessary ; and to these the unlearned are not attentive, because they look upon them as the least important parts of language ; and hence they come to be omitted or misapplied in conversation, and afterwards in writing. Besides, the spirit of commerce, manufacture, and naval enterprise, so honourable to modern Europe, and to Great

\* Hor. Ar. Poet. vers. 46.—72.

Britain in particular, and the free circulation of arts, sciences, and opinions, owing in part to the use of printing, and to our improvements in navigation, cannot fail to render the modern tongues, and especially the English, more variable than the Greek or Latin. Much indeed has been done of late to ascertain and fix the English tongue. Johnson's Dictionary is a most important, and, considered as the work of one man, a most wonderful performance. It does honour to England, and to human genius; and proves, that there is still left among us a force of mind equal to that which formerly distinguished a Stephanus or a Varro. Its influence in diffusing the knowledge of the language, and retarding its decline, is already observable:

Si Pergama dextra  
Defendi possent, etiam hac' defensa fuissent.

And yet, within the last twenty years, and since this great work was published, a multitude of new words have found their way into the English tongue, and, though both unauthorized and unnecessary, seem likely to remain in it.

In this fluctuating state of the modern languages, and of our own in particular, what could we expect from translations, if the study of Greek and Latin were to be discontinued? Suppose all the good books of antiquity

antiquity translated into English, and the originals destroyed, or, which is nearly the same thing, neglected. That English grows obsolete in one century; and, in two, that translation must be retranslated. If there were faults in the first, and I never heard of a faultless translation, they must be multiplied tenfold in the second. So that, within a few centuries, there is reason to fear, that all the old authors would be either lost, or so mangled as to be hardly worth preserving. — A system of Geometry, one would think, must lose less in a tolerable translation, than any other science. Political ideas are somewhat variable; moral notions are ambiguous in their names at least, if not in themselves; the abstruser sciences speak a language still more indefinite: but ideas of number and quantity must for ever remain distinct. And yet some late authors have thrown light upon Geometry, by reviving the study of the Greek geometricians. Let any man read a translation of Cicero and Livy, and then study the author in his own tongue; and he shall find himself not only more delighted with the manner, but also more fully instructed in the matter.

Beauty of style, and harmony of verse, would decay at the first translation, and at the second or third be quite lost. It is not possible for one who is ignorant of Latin to have any adequate notion of Virgil; the choice of his words, and the modulation of

his numbers, have never been copied with tolerable success in any other tongue. Homer has been of all poets the most fortunate in a translator; his fable, descriptions, and pathos, and, for the most part, his characters, we find in Pope: but we find not his simplicity, nor his impetuosity, nor that majestic inattention to the more trivial niceties of style, which is so graceful in him, but which no other poet dares imitate. Homer in Greek seems to sing extempore, and from immediate inspiration, or enthusiasm \*; but in English his phraseology and numbers are not a little elaborate: which I mention, not with any view to detract from the translator, who truly deserves the highest praise, but to show the insufficiency of modern language to convey a just idea of ancient writing. — I need not enlarge on this subject: it is well known, that few of the great authors of antiquity have ever been adequately translated. No man who understands Plato, Demosthenes, or Xenophon, in the Greek, or Livy, Cicero, and Virgil, in the Latin, would willingly peruse even the best translations of those authors.

\* “ His poems (says a very learned writer) were made to be recited, or sung to a company; and not read in private, or perused in a book, which few were then capable of doing: and I will venture to affirm, that whoever reads not Homer in this view, loses a great part of the delight he might receive from the poet.”  
*Blackwell's Inquiry into the Life and Writings of Homer,*  
 p. 122.



If one mode of composition be better than another, which will scarce be denied, it is surely worth while to preserve a standard of that which is best. This cannot be done, but by preserving the original authors; and they cannot be said to be preserved, unless they be studied and understood. Translations are like portraits. They may give some idea of the lineaments and colour, but the life and the motion they cannot copy; and too often, instead of exhibiting the air of the original, they present us with that only which is most agreeable to the taste of the painter. Abolish the originals, and you will soon see the copies degenerate.

There are in England two excellent styles of poetical composition. Milton is our model in the one; Dryden and Pope in the other. Milton formed himself on the ancients, and on the modern Italians who imitate their ancestors of old Rome. Dryden and Pope took the French poets for their pattern, particularly Boileau, who followed the ancients (of whom he was a passionate admirer) as far as the prosaic genius of the French tongue would permit. If we reject the old authors, and take these great moderns for our standard, we do nothing more than copy after a copy. If we reject both, and set about framing new modes of composition, our success will probably be no better, than that of the projectors whom Gulliver visited in the metropolis of Balnibarbi.

T H E E N D.









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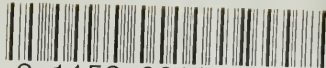
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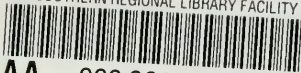
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